



When the World's All as It "Should" Be

Grappling with God: The Gospel According to Job, Part 1

Job 1:1-5

David Sunday

June 15, 2014

We rely on Your love coming to You in the name of Your Son, Jesus. Through Him we have access to You, and through Him we have life. We pray that You would supply, through our Lord Jesus, the illuminating and empowering ministry of Your Holy Spirit as we open Your Word—that we would not listen with merely human ears, but that the eyes of our hearts would be enlightened to know more of the hope to which You've called us. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

Well, my mouth has been watering for some time to begin preaching on the book of Job and I'd like to ask you to turn there in your Bible. We're going to look at the first five verses this Father's Day, and we're going to see in these verses an Old Testament example of the kind of father every Christian should aim to be. This is the kind of dad every Christian son or daughter would long to have.

You may be thinking, "What is a sermon series on Job going to be like? And in the summer time? In the nice, warm, beautiful months? Why Job? That would fit better in February, in the dark and weary months of winter. Why the book of Job?"

Some of you may be excited. Job is a marvelous work of poetry. The Victorian essayist, Thomas Carlyle, called it "the grandest book ever written with pen." It's also a book that has sustained God's people in some of their darkest days. I was reading Mike Mason, a modern writer, who said, "During my night of anguish, I'd turn to the book of Job and there I began to make contact with the gospel in a way that somehow I never had in studying the New Testament."

It's very possible, therefore, to experience more of the beauty and power of the gospel as we come to an Old Testament book like Job. I just want to acknowledge my indebtedness to the scholar, Christopher Ash, for his work on the book of Job. He's had a big influence on the shaping of this series and on this message. He says:

Job is a fireball book. It is a staggeringly honest book. It is a book that knows what people actually say and think, not just what they say publicly in church. It knows what people say behind closed doors and in whispers. And it knows what we say in our tears. It's not merely an academic book. If we listen to it carefully,

it will touch us, trouble us, and unsettle us at a deep level.

I think that's inviting. We are a church that loves the truth, but, if we're honest, I think we have to say that sometimes we really love the sanitized version of the truth. We want the tidy truth, the truth nicely and neatly packaged. However, Job did not give us that kind of truth. He gave us raw, bracing, unsettling truth because that's the kind of world we live in. It's raw; it's bracing; it can be unsettling.

I heard a story about a man who had gone through quite an ordeal. . When he was asked to tell the story about what he had been through he said, "Well, there are three versions. Which one do you want to hear? First, there's the version I tell the Christians. Then there's the version of the story I tell the non-Christians. Finally, there's the truth."

Job didn't give us the Christian version. He gave us the truth in all its raw power. As we come to the book of Job, the question is how badly do you want and how badly do you need to hear truth right now? Job did not convert the truth into pious pablum. He told us the truth like it is.

As we go through this book, we're going to see that Job grappled with God with two basic types of questions:

- Do we live in a world in which good is rewarded and evil is punished? Will the good ultimately be rewarded? Will the evil be punished? These are straightforward questions and we'd all like to know the answers. Job grappled with these very questions.
- Then on a deeper level, Job grappled with these questions: Can I believe with confidence that the God Who created this universe and Who rules sovereignly over it is a good God? Can He be trusted? Is He worthy of my devotion and reverence? What kind of God is ruling this world? Will I worship Him no matter what comes my way? These are the deeper questions Job grappled with. It's a very honest book.

Someone might be wondering, "Pastor, are you sure we can handle this? Are you sure we can handle five months in Job?" My commitment to you is that I will only preach that which I believe is useful in the hands of the Holy Spirit to shepherd this flock. I'm not trying to write a commentary on Job or say everything there is to say about Job. However, we're here because I believe God has some serious shepherding work He wants to do in our life together as a church through this book. So if it takes five months or four months or six months, it doesn't really matter to me. I believe God wants to strengthen our hearts by His grace and I believe God wants to shepherd and care for us through this book.

I want to encourage you to trust the Holy Spirit as we enter into this series. The Holy Spirit gave us a very long book—42 chapters—as if to say there are no easy answers when facing the dilemmas of suffering and adversity in this world.

You can't condense God's answer into a tweet or write it on a postcard. It's going to take time and patience to work through our suffering. God doesn't say, "Just a spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down." God understands that when we go through trials, hardships and difficulties they don't just go away instantaneously. We need to grapple with them so He's given us a long book.

Also, we must trust the Holy Spirit in what He tells us about the book of Job. In the New Testament, the Apostle James gave us insight into the intentions of God in giving us this Old Testament book. James 5:11 says, "*Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.*"

When we read that, a little bell should be going off in our minds. Ding! Ding! Ding! As we go through this book we're supposed to see the purpose of the Lord—that He is compassionate and merciful. God wants to take us there. God wants to drive us deeper into the bedrock of the gospel and use this book to show us more clearly how our Lord is compassionate and merciful. It's probably not the first thing you thought you'd see in the book of Job, but that's God's intention.

As we go through this together as a church, I trust that we will become more tender and wise counselors to one another. We're going to learn how to care for one another more wisely and deeply, and we're going to become more ardent worshipers of our compassionate and merciful God.

You'll also notice that I'm borrowing phrases from a song we sing frequently here and I want to give proper credit for it:

Blessed Be Your Name
In the land that is plentiful
Where Your streams of abundance flow
Blessed be Your name

Every blessing You pour out
I'll turn back to praise
When the darkness closes in, Lord
Still I will say

Blessed Be Your name
When I'm found in the desert place
Though I walk through the wilderness
Blessed Be Your name

Blessed be the name of the Lord
Blessed be Your name
Blessed be the name of the Lord
Blessed be Your glorious name

Blessed be Your name
When the sun's shining down on me
When the world's 'all as it should be'
Blessed be Your name

Blessed be the name of the Lord
Blessed be Your name
Blessed be the name of the Lord
Blessed be Your glorious name

Blessed be Your name
On the road marked with suffering
Though there's pain in the offering
Blessed be Your name

Blessed be the name of the Lord
Blessed be Your name
Blessed be the name of the Lord
Blessed be Your glorious name

Every blessing You pour out
I'll turn back to praise
When the darkness closes in, Lord
Still I will say

You give and take away
You give and take away
My heart will choose to say
Lord, blessed be Your name
(Blessed be Your Name, Matt Redman)

Job's Introduction

So we turn to the introduction in the first five verses. I know how introductions can be. Kate and I returned last night from a wedding in Winona Lake, Indiana. It was a beautiful time together and it's going to be hard for us to see our friends go off to Texas; we're going to miss them greatly. But at a wedding like that, you're always being introduced to new people. You've probably had this experience: someone tells you their name, you have it for about three seconds, but then you forget it right away. Then they start telling you things about themselves and you're trying so hard to keep up. When you walk away, you can forget all about what that person just told you. In fact, there is probably someone in this room right now to whom you were introduced to a year or two years ago and you're embarrassed to even go over and talk to them now. You're thinking, "I should know his name by now, but I can't remember it." So, for a little while, we're going to call a moratorium on embarrassment about forgetting people's names, and I want you to reintroduce yourselves to one another and get to know each other.

Introductions can be difficult like that. We forget what we've heard. However, we can't do that with the book of Job. It's crucial that we remember what we're going to hear in these first five verses. If we forget what we are introduced to here, we will end up going way off track in our interpretation of the rest of the book.

Job's Identity

We're told four aspects of this man's life that we need to keep in mind. We need to fix them there and keep them there throughout the rest of the book. We're told about his identity, his integrity, his prosperity, and, finally, his anxiety. Let's first look at Job's identity.

Job 1:1 says, *"There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job..."*

Job was a real man. He was not a mythical figure. There was such a man named Job. Along with Noah and Daniel, Job is mentioned twice in the book of Ezekiel 14 as among the godliest men who have ever lived. Noah was a real man; Daniel was a real man; Job was a real man. Through Ezekiel the prophet, God holds Job up as a very godly man.

He is also mentioned, as we said, in the book of James in the New Testament. In the context of that passage, he is listed among the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. So we have a real, historical figure here.

He is a real man, but he's also everyman. He's someone with whom everyone can identify. We have no genealogy for Job like we do with Abraham and the other patriarchs. We know that he was not from Israel, the Promised Land. Job was from the land of Uz, which was somewhere outside of the Promised Land, out in the Arabian Desert. Uz is also mentioned in Lamentations 4:21 in relationship to Edom.

He was not an Israelite but Job probably lived at the time of the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We see in this passage that he functioned as a priest in his own family. This was probably before the Levitical priesthood was established. He lived independently of the promises given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He lived outside of the land, before the time of the exodus and before the law was given. One commentator says:

This makes his story all the more wonderful, because here is a man who knows almost nothing of God and yet he knows God and he trusts God and he worships Him as God. This man from the land of Uz, whose name was Job, stands as a brilliant example to us in the 21st Century of a man of unimpeachable integrity.

Job's Integrity

Look at the second part of verse one. Here we see four strands of Job's integrity woven together, which made him strong and firm through the fiercest drought and storm. He *"was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil."*

Unimpeachable integrity marked this man's life. Job was a blameless man. That word does mean the same thing as guiltless. Job wasn't sinlessly perfect. Later in the book, Job himself acknowledged that he was a sinner. However, there was a genuineness about him. There was authenticity about him. The word "blameless" is the same word Joshua used in Joshua 24:14, where he said, "Serve the Lord in sincerity."

Job was sincere in his faith. He was genuine. He did not pretend. There was no duplicity in him. What was on the inside of Job was the same as what was on the outside. When you look at his words and deeds, you can see an accurate reflection of the godly character of

Job's life. He did not hide anything or have a mere appearance of godliness. He was a really godly man.

We must remember this throughout the book, because many things will come up in this book that will make us wonder if Job was really blameless. We may need to go back to the first verse and see that, yes, he was a blameless man.

We also need to be encouraged by this. It is possible, by the grace of God, to live a life of integrity and sincerity—a life that God says “pleases Me and is blameless in My sight” (1 Samuel 29:9). Sometimes, we carry in our hearts this lurking fear—this suspicion—that God is impossible to please. However, through faith, a person who walks with God can live in such a way that God says, “You are blameless.” Even if you have done terrible things, through the work that Jesus has done on the cross, God can say, “All the charges against you are dropped; you are guiltless and blameless in My sight.” He can make you blameless and can keep you blameless in His eyes. That's what the gospel tells us and that's good news each one of us.

Job was blameless. He was also upright. Upright focuses on the way Job treated other people. He was utterly honest and open. He was generous, kind and straightforward. You could trust Job with your wife, your daughters or your pocketbook. He wouldn't double-deal you or cheat you. He was straightforward, sincere, compassionate, kind and honest in the deep ways he dealt with his neighbors.

He feared God. This was the foundation of his wisdom. He lived his life *coram deo* (“before the face of God”), utterly desiring to please God and not wanting to hide any part of his life from the searching gaze of God. He loved God and experienced God's love in such a way that Job said, “I earnestly want to walk in obedience to You.”

Finally, he turned away from evil. He resolutely stayed on the straight and narrow course. When there were crooked bypaths and detours to sin, Job refused to turn onto those paths. Job lived a life of daily repentance. He was habitually turning away from sin in his thoughts, words and deeds. To know a man like Job is to have a living example of the righteousness that comes by faith in Jesus Christ.

We want to be disciple-makers of our children. Dads, this should be one of our goals: to raise up our kids to follow Jesus. It begins with our own example. It starts with our own lives and we need to be encouraged, as we read this description of an Old Testament saint, that, by the grace of God, He can create these same qualities of integrity in our lives. Oh, how desperately we need them!

So we see Job presented to us here as an example of unimpeachable integrity. He was genuinely good, caring and compassionate. He was a man who really walked with God and feared God (even Satan agreed with this).

It raises a question. Do the good get rewarded in this life? The following quote is something I drew from the 19th Century. I purposely took something from a previous generation. The words are a little different, but I want to read this statement from William Henry Green. He was a professor at Princeton Seminary in the 1800's. I want to ask you, is this true or false?

Green said:

If any man on earth should be a happy man, it is he who is truly religious. Looking barely at his present life, and at the sources of gratification which are opened before us here, the good man is most truly blessed. Religion does not foster gloom; it is the perennial spring of cheerfulness and joy. It does not abridge the enjoyments of life: it multiplies and heightens them. And there is no step that any person can take more fraught with blessing to himself in this world, as well as in the next, than that in which he makes choice of God as his portion and his friend, and pledges himself to be his ever-faithful servant.

Think about that. True or false? Is the life of devotion to God the happiest path? Is it the most blessed life? Is it the most joyous life? True or false? What do you say? Let's have a debate.

I say true normally. True usually. This is Psalm 128:1:

*Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD,
who walks in his ways!*

Blessed is that man! Then it gives you the picture of a fruitful life with children around the table, blessings and prosperity. This happy family belongs to the one who fears the Lord.

Psalm 58:11:

*Mankind will say, 'Surely there is a reward for the righteous;
surely there is a God who judges on earth.'*

We see throughout Scripture this strand of teaching that the way of blessing is the path of obedience. The path of faith and obedience is the blessed life—the good life. It is the most joyous life to follow and serve the Lord in sincerity and faithfulness. In the first five verses of Job, it looks like the world was all as it should be. Not only was Job's life marked by unimpeachable integrity, it was also marked by enormous prosperity. In the case of Job, the good man was also a great man.

Job's Prosperity

We see Job's prosperity outlined in verses two through four. Verse two begins with his family, saying, "*There were born to him seven sons and three daughters.*"

These are numbers of completion and perfection. To have seven sons was to be completely blessed. To add three daughters in the mix, well, it doesn't get any better than that. Do you know anyone with seven sons and three daughters? I was thinking, "I think I do know someone with seven sons and three daughters." I counted up the Freidel children, and there you are! A blessed family!

Job's kids enjoyed one another. In verse four, when they had a birthday, the sons would host a feast in their homes. They would invite their sisters and have a wonderful time. There is no suggestion in the passage that these were raucous orgies or anything like that. These were just joyful family parties. They loved being together.

This is what dads long for in their children—that our sons and daughters would grow up to love one another. Isn't it a beautiful thing when you see them in their adulthood enjoying that fellowship and warmth with each other? Job had that blessing in his family.

He also had blessing in his property. We read these magnificent descriptions in verse three: "*He possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels...*"

I was just in a town in Indiana that didn't even have 3,000 people! Job had 3,000 camels. Camels were very prestigious animals. To have camels signified status in society. Job was probably involved in caravan trading.

He had "*500 yoke of oxen* [that's a lot of land to plow] *and 500 female donkeys.*" Job was a wealthy, influential, Middle Eastern sheik. He was, as the Scripture says, "*the greatest of all the people of the east.*" Do you see that at the end of verse three? This was a prominent, influential man in society, and he was a godly man. It's wonderful when those two things come together!

I heard that in England they have a saying about a large gathering of prominent people. They'll say, "The good and the great were there," making a distinction. The great are not always the good, and the good are often not great. But in Job's case, he was both good and great.

We read this description of his prosperity and say, "Yes! Surely, there is a reward for the righteous. Surely, there is a God Who judges on earth." And that is true, even when material prosperity is not nearly as great as Job's. First Timothy 6:6 says, "*But godliness with contentment is great gain...*" It is a wonderful thing to walk with God—to be freed through the grace of God from the dominion of things like envy, hatred, jealousy and strife; to know peace

with God and one another; to experience true love for your neighbor; to experience communion with God and fellowship with Him. It is a wonderful life to follow God!

We look at Job's story and see the sun was shining down on Job. He lived in a land that was plentiful. That world was all as it should be. The question is, "Is it really? Is the world really all as it should be?" Job knew it wasn't. Job knew that, underneath the surface of this idyllic picture—underneath the surface of this happy family—there was a troubling undercurrent. It's a happy picture, but there was one dark shadow lurking and Job saw the shadow. He knew it was there. Job was always aware of this dark shadow, even in the midst of all his joy and prosperity.

Job's Anxiety

This brings us to the last point which we see it in verse five: "*And when the days of the feast had run their course...*" Job wasn't at these feasts but when they were over, "*Job would send and consecrate [his children]...*" One by one, he gathered them all back to him—all ten of them.

Early in the morning, the Bible says, he would rise. There was a sense of urgency about what he did. He called them one by one and offered a burnt offering. He consecrated them. He set them apart before the Lord. He reminded them that they belonged to a Holy God and then he offered a sacrifice—a sacrificial animal.

As that animal was burned up in the presence of a Holy God, it symbolized God's hot anger against sin being consumed in the animal. God's anger was poured out, and the animal absorbed that anger and wrath of God that was due for human sin. As Job brought each of his children to him one by one, they got this graphic illustration: they saw this burnt offering—this expensive sacrifice—made on their behalf.

I could imagine Job saying to each of them, "This one's for you, my child. See what happens to that animal. This is what the guilt of your sin and my sin deserves. This is what would happen to you and to me if there was not sacrifice."

The sacrifice was necessary, in Job's mind, because he said in verse five, "*It may be that my children have sinned...*" Don't think of Job as this brooding, old man who had an over scrupulous conscious, didn't know how to have fun and was always worried that something happened. No, this was a realistic assessment of a blameless man who feared the Lord and shunned evil. He was a man who walked in daily repentance and knew the plague of his own heart. He knew the power of sin in his own heart and also knew that sin worked in his children's hearts. Job was concerned about the hearts of his children.

He said, "*It may be that my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.*"

These children did not get together and say all kinds of blasphemies out loud. No, this was a godly family. We don't do those kinds of things in a godly family. But Job was concerned that, at some point, his children may have subtly said farewell to God in their hearts during one of these parties. Maybe they forgot God in His presence. Maybe they acted as if God was not there; as if God did not see them; as if they did not have any duty to serve Him and live for Him. Job was concerned that, in the midst of all their prosperity and all their celebration, their hearts may have turned away from the Lord. They may have forgotten to praise God from Whom all these blessings flow.

We read, "*Thus Job did continually.*" Continually, he served as the priest in his family, interceding for his children. Fathers, do you know this activity in your family? Do you know what it is like to come before God and plead for your children that they would be connected to a merciful and faithful High Priest, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who atoned for their sins? Do you know what it is like to plead that God would give your children a heart to fear the Lord, love Him and serve Him in sincerity, and that God would be merciful to them as He's been to you?

As fathers in the home, this is one of our main ministries. We serve, in a sense, as the priests of our family, representing our children before God and before Jesus, our great High Priest. Job understood that, even though the world was all as it should be on the outside, there was something underneath the surface that needed to be dealt with and could only be dealt with through sacrifice.

That brings us to the 21st Century. We are some of the most blessed people on the face of this earth. In our congregation, there are a number of people walking on the road marked with suffering. There are a number of people for whom there is pain in the offering. But for most of us, right now we can say that "the sun's shining down on me. The world's all as it should be. The land is plentiful. The streams of abundance flow."

Yes, we have our struggles and problems, but God has been incredibly good and gracious to so many of us. Let us learn a lesson from the wisdom of Job. It is precisely at this point—in the best of times—when we need to learn this lesson so we will be ready to live through the worst of times. Job taught us that there is a hidden evil lurking in all our hearts. There is a temptation to forget God. Even when all the blessings of God are being lavished on our lives, though His goodness and glory are evident all around us, there is something in our hearts that resists acknowledging God and giving Him thanks for all His blessings. When the sun's shining down on me, when the world's all as it should be, when the land is plentiful, when the streams of abundance flow, there is something in my heart that does not want to say, "Blessed be the name

of the Lord!" There is something in my heart that wants to live independently from Him. That's sin. This is true in the happiest and most blessed of families, and Job knew it. Job saw it.

I want to close by reading a quote from Christopher Ash. He asks, "Why would men and women blessed with such harmony and abundant prosperity do anything other than praise and love God from the bottom of their hearts?"

Why? Why would people like us do anything other than praise and love God from the bottom of our hearts? Why? Yet, the possibility is there. It exercised Job over every family gathering. There is something dark in human hearts and Job knew it—something so dark that only sacrifice can cover it.

Whether we're going home today to joyous family celebrations or to brokenness, difficulty and pain, let us all come to this table. Let us thank God that, on our behalf, a bleeding Sacrifice appeared on Calvary—a Sacrifice that takes away sin. As we come here, let's acknowledge our need for the cross of Jesus. The best and the blessed need this bleeding Sacrifice just as much as the bruised and broken. In both the good times and the bad times, we need a Savior; we need a Sacrifice.

He's the Savior Who died for all, so that all might live. He's alive today to meet each and every one of us and to welcome us into God's family. To all who recognize their need of a Savior, He holds His arms open wide and says, "Come. Come to me. Come to me."

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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