



Where There Is Pain in the Offering

Grappling with God: The Gospel According to Job, Part 2

Job 1:6-2:10

David Sunday

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We trust in the Lord, for in the Lord we have an everlasting rock. Through the worship this morning and the liturgy we've gone through thus far, confessing our faith in the providence of God, God has already prepared us so well for the message of Job 1 and 2.

As you turn to Job 1 and 2 in your Bible, I want to dive right in with a quote to ponder that describes the type of response we should have in our hearts as we come to this passage and consider God's Word to us.

"God is God. If He is God, He is worthy of my worship and my service. I will find rest nowhere but in His will, and that will is infinitely, immeasurably, unspeakably beyond my largest notions of what He is up to."

This is what Elisabeth Elliot wrote in 1996 as she was thinking back over the deaths of two of her husbands. The first was Jim Elliot with whom she served as a missionary in South America until he died at the age of 29 at the hands of the very people to whom they had gone to bring the gospel. Her second husband died of cancer; she also faced countless, inexplicable tragedies and trials. This was her conclusion reflecting on her life.

Do you believe this? And how do you know whether you believe this? Well, you know through calamities, through trials and afflictions. Trials will happen to all of us, and most of us, at some point in our lives, are going to experience something sudden; something unexpected; something that comes without explanation; something that we cannot figure out. It may even seem absurd and meaningless, but that crisis—that testing—will prove whether or not we really believe that God is God. And if He is God, He is worthy of our worship and service. We will find

rest nowhere but in His will and that will is infinitely, immeasurably, unspeakably beyond our largest notions of what God is up to.

Last week, we saw that he was a man of unimpeachable integrity in verse one. He was blameless and upright. He feared God. He turned away from evil. Furthermore, he was a man of unparalleled prosperity. Verse three says he was the greatest of all of the people of the east. He was a man who is both good and great.

However, what happened when everything he had was taken from him? Did this good man remain good when he was no longer great? An old writer has said:

A change of circumstances often makes a great change in men themselves, or at least exposes a new and previously unsuspected side of their character. Sometimes, it brings to light defects that had never been dreamed of in those who had been esteemed almost faultless. Sometimes, it reveals unanticipated excellencies.

Emergencies are the making of some men and the destruction of others. How will it be with Job? Well, the text before us allows us to see. We have four scenes. The first is in heaven; the second is on earth; the third is in heaven; and the fourth is on earth. First, we are going to focus on the earthly scenes and then on the heavenly scenes, because I want us to consider what it was like from Job's perspective. We know a lot more than Job knew about the reason for his sufferings. We have no indication in Scripture that Job ever found out why he suffered as he did. That knowledge is given to us but not to Job.

The Scene of Suffering

Job suffered according to God's will, but God's will was infinitely, immeasurably, unspeakably beyond Job's largest notions of what God was up to. So let's look first at the scene of suffering. Let's consider what Job sees—what it is like from his perspective.

It begins in verse 13 with these ominous words: "*Now there was a day...*" A day of infamy. His sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their elder brothers' house. Suddenly, in rapid-fire succession, the messengers came, each one with a devastating blow that pummeled Job with ever-increasing intensity.

First, one came and said, "The Sabeans attacked! Your ox and donkeys were taken. Your servants were struck down with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." Before he even got the words out of his mouth, another came and said, "*The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you.*" While he was still speaking, another came, saying, "*The Chaldeans formed*

three groups and made a raid on the camels and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you.”

Job went from riches to rags in a moment. He was bankrupt. But the worst of all was in verse 18, which says, *“While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, ‘Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother’s house...’* Job was thinking, *“Yes, I know that. Please don’t tell me!”*

Before Job could even ask, *“Are they okay?”* the breathless servant said, *“... [A]nd behold, a great wind came across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they are dead, and I alone have escaped to tell you.”*

Bankrupt and bereft, Job’s whole world caved in. All his wealth was vaporized, and then, in one fell swoop, all ten children were wiped out in a tornado of terror. We can understand why Job later says in 9:18, *“God will not let me catch my breath, but fills me instead with bitter sorrows.”*

Who cannot weep with Job? We have seen it all on the news, have we not? Tsunamis wreaking havoc, destroying hundreds and thousands of tourists on Thai beaches. Wars that ravage throughout the world. Terrorism that takes down two towers in a matter of 20 minutes, destroying thousands of people. We know about post-traumatic stress disorder, but where in human history has there ever been such an extreme devastation in one man’s life as this? It’s beyond comprehension!

I thought I could say to you, *“Put yourself in Job’s shoes,”* but then I thought, *“No, that’s impossible.”* We cannot imagine the grief, shock the horror that this man experienced. James said, *“You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.”*

But Job probably had a hard time seeing the compassion and the mercy in God’s purposes. How did he respond? This good man was no longer great. Did he remain good? It’s amazing that, in verses 20 and 21, this battered, bruised and broken man responded brilliantly. He did not deny his pain. He did not pretend there was no grief. He was not a stoic about this, and neither should we be in the midst of our grief. He was distraught and truly grieved.

Verse 20 says, *“Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped.”* The ESV Study Bible calls this *“lament-laden worship.”* Has there ever been worship like this?

Mike Basin makes a perceptive observation. He says, *“Job could never have reacted as he did unless he had been practicing for this moment all his life.”* That’s what we are doing every Sunday morning. That’s why it is so important that we do not neglect assembling together.

That's why it is so important that we rehearse the ways of God, the works of God and the dealings of God in history and in our lives through Scripture, confessions of faith and songs of praise Sunday after Sunday. That is what we are aiming to do in these gatherings. We want to shepherd God's flock so that we will be ready on the day of calamity to not curse God but, instead, to bless His name.

He fell on the ground and worshiped and said in verse 21, "*Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.*" Amazing! Job saw himself as a man who had no worldly rights. Job teaches us what we should all realize: "I have no right to the shirt on my back. I have no right to my next meal. I have no right to good health. I have no right to a comfortable pension. I have no right to come into this world and be created by such a wise and magnificent Creator in a body that I don't even understand but works so well most of the time. I have no right to be redeemed by the blood of His Son. I have no right to be blessed with a great wife, three wonderful children. When I insist on my own worldly rights and comforts, I just become a grumbler and complainer."

I was thinking about that yesterday. There are verbal complaints I have uttered this week, as well as grumblings and murmurings within my heart. How ugly, inappropriate, and out of sync that is with who I am and Who God is! I don't have these rights. God's glory matters more than my or your personal comfort. Job got that. He saw that. "Naked I came. Naked I will return... Blessed be the name of the Lord."

Job knew nothing of why he was suffering so drastically, but he knew that God is God. And if God is God, He is worthy of Job's worship and service, and Job knew he would find rest nowhere but in God's will, even if God's will is infinitely, immeasurably, unspeakably beyond Job's largest notions of what God is up to in his life. At this point, Job did not know what God was up to.

But it's not over! Look at 2:1, where we find these ominous words again: "*Again there was a day...*" We don't know how much time elapsed. A week? A year? A decade? We really don't know. The narrative inclines me to believe it wasn't a very long time between these two episodes of suffering, but even if quite some time went by, we know that anyone who has suffered what Job suffered doesn't just move on. You don't get over the pain of losing a child, let alone ten children.

By God's grace, you can absorb the pain; you can glean treasures hidden in the darkness; you can experience redemption in the grief. But any parent who has lost one of his own children will tell you something breaks inside of you that will never be fully mended until the new

creation. You walk with a limp now. Your worship is lament-laden. You bear a scar. There is a tender, fragile place within you that can produce tears long after the immediacy of the loss.

However long it had been, Job had certainly not moved on, and he would get buried under another avalanche of affliction. Again, he did not know what was going on in heaven. All he knew was what happened in verse seven. He was suddenly covered with a loathsome skin disease, breaking out from the sole of his feet to the crown of his head.

I'm just going to let Job himself describe what this was like by reading a few verses from further on in the book. In 7:5, Job said, "*My flesh is clothed with worms and dirt; my skin hardens, then breaks out afresh.*" In 16:8, 16, Job said, "...[M]y leanness has risen up against me; it testifies to my face... *My face is red with weeping, and on my eyelids is deep darkness...*" In 17:7, Job said, "...[A]ll my members are like a shadow." And in 30:17 and 30, Job said, "*The night racks my bones, and the pain that gnaws me takes no rest... My skin turns black and falls from me, and my bones burn with heat.*"

In 8:2, we read that Job took a piece of broken pottery to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes. Where do you find ashes and broken pots? Probably out in a junkyard somewhere, in a place where lepers and people with outrageous diseases were quarantined. Job became an outcast. Without warning, without explanation, and without relief, Job's life was ruined. He had no idea why.

Oswald Chambers said:

When I suffer and I feel I am to blame for it, I can explain it to myself. When I suffer and know I am not to blame, it is a harder matter. But when I suffer and realize that my most intimate relations think I am to blame, that is the limit of my suffering.

Job was about to be brought to the limit, and it started with his own wife in verse nine. His wife asked him, "*Do you still hold fast your integrity?*" She looked at him with his loathsome disease, and like most of the ancients, she assumed that for someone whose skin was rotting like this, it must be a reflection of the condition of his soul. It must be a sign of God's wrath and judgment on the person.

So she asked Job, "You still think you're blameless? You still think you're righteous? You still think you fear God and turn away from evil? Job, give it up! Just curse God! That will bring the divine death sentence on you, and you can be spared of this prolonged misery. Die!"

I think we can be way too hard on Job's wife. I think it's a mistake to make moral judgments about her. We need to remember that here was a woman who also suffered immensely along with her husband. Here was a mother who lost ten of her children and all of her wealth and property. She went through this with Job. The only thing she didn't go through was

the second cycle—the loathsome disease—but she didn’t know why this was happening. She looked at her husband—this man who had been her provider and rock, the father of her children—and she was just bewildered in grief. Any wife who loves her husband doesn’t want to see him suffer like this.

Whatever her motives may have been, she added to Job’s misery by becoming the devil’s mouthpiece. With her foolish words, Job found himself utterly abandoned and alone. He kindly rebuked his wife. Sensitive to her stress, he did not call her a fool but he said, *“You speak as one of the foolish women would speak.”*

Again, his response at the end of Job 2:10 was remarkable. *“Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?”* Should we not just take God’s blessings and benefits and not also receive trouble and affliction from God’s hand? Is that worthy of the God we worship? If God is God, is He not worthy of our worship and service no matter what we’re going through? Whether it’s in good times or in bad, whether it’s through plenty or want, whether it’s in sickness or in health, in joy or in sorrow, is He not worthy of our worship and our service?

There were two rounds of affliction and in both times, we’re told at the end, “In all this, Job did not sin or charge God with wrong” (1:22; 2:10). In all this, Job did not sin with his lips. He proved to be, as the wisdom writers said, a perfect man: *“And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body”* (James 3:2).

Job affirmed that God is God, sovereign over all, and even when His will is infinitely, immeasurably, and unspeakably beyond Job’s highest notions of what God was up to, Job said He is worthy to be trusted and worthy to be worshiped. That was the scene of Job’s suffering.

The Scenery Behind the Scene

Now, let’s look a little bit at “the scenery behind the scene,” a phrase from Oswald Chambers. What do we see that Job did not see? God wants us to see some things that He did not want Job to see. He wants us to know about these things. God peeled back the curtain of heaven to give us a perspective on what happened on earth because we can never figure out what’s going on in the world or in our own lives unless we get the heavenly perspective on it. God wants us to get a heavenly perspective.

There are two cycles—two scenes from heaven—and the same, basic themes are repeated in both of these cycles. Let me just point out three themes God wants us to see that Job did not have knowledge of.

First, it was not because of Job's sin that he was suffering. Job believed that. He held fast to his integrity but Job did not know the next part. It was because of his righteousness that he suffered the way he did.

We see in both of the heavenly scenes that there was a heavenly cabinet meeting taking place with sons of God gathered in God's cabinet, God's servants and angels who were sent to do His bidding, ministering spirits sent to serve those who are to inherit salvation—gathered in God's cabinet. Low and behold, a vile servant also appeared. Literally, “the Satan”—that adversary; the accuser—also came among them. What was he doing there (verse six)? Wandering in off the street? He showed no reverence, no respect, toward God.

In these chapters, we get the longest recorded conversation between God and Satan in the Bible. Nowhere in the remaining 40 chapters of Job is the idea of a personal, supernatural, evil enemy ever mentioned. Job never talked about Satan. He did not even give an indication that he thought the devil might be behind all of this. But we know about it from the first two chapters. Both times, God got the first word and God got the last word in the dialogue with Satan, showing us Who is sovereign over whom.

God said to Satan in 1:7, and likewise in 2:2, *“From where have you come?”* That's kind of like, “What are you doing here?” It is, perhaps, like what a parent would ask an adolescent child who comes home late at night, “What have you been up to?” And the child answers, “Nothing! Just hanging around...”

Satan says, *“From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.”* He's just walking around, looking, observing, watching and prowling like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). God says, “Hmm. Have you noticed Job? Have you considered my servant, Job? There is none like him on the earth! He is a blameless man, an upright man who fears God and turns away from evil.” If we ever doubt that throughout the rest of the book, God repeats it again in 2:3. God wants us to know that Job's character is unimpeachable.

I like how John Piper illustrates what happens here in the heavenly courtroom:

It's as though a diamond thief should meet the owner at the back of a jewelry store late at night. The owner says, “What are you doing?” And the thief answers, “Just walking around in the store.” And then the owner says, “Did you see our most precious diamond up there at the front? Did you notice?”

That's what God did with Satan. He was setting Job up for this trial. Job did not realize this. It was not because of his sin that he was suffering but because of his righteousness. God singled out his friend, Job. “Have you seen how this man loves Me and serves Me and worships Me? Do you see, Satan, how much I am worth to Job? Do you realize how much he is worth to Me?”

I have a little book that someone wrote on the book of Job titled, How God Treats His Friends. Sometimes God takes His choicest servants and puts them through an unspeakable trial so that through their loyalty and devotion and through their saying, “God is God. And if He is God, He is worthy of my devotion and my service, even if I don’t understand what He is up to.’ God singles out His choice servants, putting them on display before a watching world. Nature and the supernatural realms are watching these saints suffer, and they’re asking the question, “Does anyone love God just because He is God? Is God worthy of worship because of Who He is in Himself?”

That brings us to the second observation from the heavenly cabinet room: Satan is doing something necessary for the glory of God. That’s a hard thought for us to get our minds around, but Satan wouldn’t exist unless he ultimately existed for God’s glory.

We don’t live in a dualistic universe where there are equally opposing forces fighting against one another for supremacy. God is clearly supreme, but He exercises His supremacy and sovereignty through agents, some of whom are good and some of whom are evil. Through the evil, something necessary is being done for the glory of God.

Satan could not stand the thought that God was worshiped, loved, and trusted simply because He is God. Twice in this passage, he assaulted God’s glory. In verses nine and ten, he essentially said, “You are infatuated! You are infatuated with this idea that people love You for Your own sake, God. No one does and no one ever will. They only pretend to love You because of all the good things You do for them and give them. They married You for the money, God. They don’t love You and serve You. They only love and serve themselves. They use You to get what they want. So take away all that he has and You’ll see the truth, God. You’re not worthy of worship.”

When that didn’t work, Satan said, “All right, go for the jugular. Destroy his skin; destroy his health; and then he will curse You to Your face.” Do you see that the attack on Job was really an attack on God? Job did not know it but God was showing off Job as an example of the best servant He had. If Job only loved God for the fringe benefits, then God utterly failed to produce loving servants. God could have silenced Satan right then and there. He knew what was in Job’s heart. But God did not silence Satan because Satan was unwittingly serving a purpose that would bring glory to God.

This quote by Christopher Ash says it well: Satan has a ministry. It is the ministry of opposition, the ministry of insisting that the genuineness of the believer be tested and approved genuine. It is a hostile and malicious ministry, but it is a necessary ministry for the glory of God. God is supremely worthy of worship just because He is God. It is necessary for His glory to be

publicly seen before all the universe, before all the principalities and powers of this present evil age. His worth is not dependent on His gifts; only on Who He is. He is worthy. And it's necessary for the supreme worth of God to be put on display in this world by us, His followers.

That brings me to the last observation. "God allows Satan only enough space to accomplish the very opposite of what Satan had wanted" (Tim Keller). We see it in verse 12 of chapter one: *"And the Lord said to Satan, 'Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand.'" Satan can only do as much as God allows.*

Then in 2:6, *"And the Lord said to Satan, 'Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life.'" That's why Martin Luther said, "Satan is God's Satan." He is under God's sovereign authority. Both times, God allowed this unspeakable evil to come upon His servant Job. Both times we can picture the hosts of heaven holding their breath, waiting for the outcome. We can picture an alleluia choir in heaven praising God as Job fell to the ground and worshiped, saying, "Blessed be the name of the Lord." We see this choir again, praising God in heaven as Job said to his wife, "Shall we receive good from God and shall we not receive evil?" Through it all, Job never sinned.*

Both times, Satan's plan was foiled. For Job, the suffering seemed interminable, unbearable, and inexplicable but, in the end, the evil Job experienced would only result in endless praise, glory and blessing. Even here, 3,000 years later, we're praising the God of Job for the way this story ended. Even 3,000 years later!

It can be scary for us to read Job because we know that in some measure, we, too, will experience unexpected, inexplicable suffering in our lives. It can be scary. Tim Keller says:

The story of Job is a smaller version of what God is doing in your life and in the history of the world. God has now mapped out a plan for history that includes evil as part of it. This confuses and angers us. But the book of Job pulls back the veil for just an instant and shows us that God will allow evil only to the degree that it brings about the very opposite of what it intends.

And isn't that exactly what we see in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ? In the gospel, we see the Son of God, Who was infinitely and eternally great, Who did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but, instead, emptied Himself and made Himself nothing for the glory of God (Philippians 2:5-8). Jesus became bankrupt and bereft of everything. Jesus became loathsome in His suffering. He had no form or majesty that we should desire Him, no beauty that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and rejected of man, a man of sorrows, acquainted with suffering (Isaiah 53). He was One from Whom we would hide our faces. Jesus suffered in unspeakably greater ways than Job did.

The ultimate evil—the ultimate devastation and dereliction—is what Jesus experienced on the cross. But God allowed that evil only to the degree that it brought about the very opposite of what was intended. It brought about the salvation of a multitude of sinners. Satan did not intend that outcome from the evil of Christ suffering on the cross, but that was the outcome. So we see more than Job saw. We see the outcome and reason for Job’s sufferings. We see the fulfillment of Job’s sufferings in Jesus Christ, and in Jesus Christ we find life and salvation.

In 1 Peter 1:6-7, the Apostle Peter says:

In this [great salvation] you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

In all of our lives, God is at work doing the same thing He was doing in Job’s life. We are still called to suffer today, though probably not as badly as Job did. However like Job, we will rarely know the reasons why we’re suffering as we do, except for this: we know that these sufferings are necessary for the glory of God in this world. Is that enough for you? Is that enough?

Three Questions

I want to close by posing three questions. These are questions for us to ponder as we consecrate ourselves to the Lord. God is God. If God is God, He is worthy of our worship and service, and we will find rest nowhere but in His will. The same question that stood behind the scene of Job’s suffering stands behind the scene of your life and my life today. Here’s what God is asking:

- Will you love and worship God simply for Who He is and not only for the benefits He brings?
- Will you trust what God has revealed in Jesus Christ in the gospel, even when everything in your present experience seems to contradict it?
- Will you bring glory to God—will you rest in His sovereign will—even when His will for you is infinitely, immeasurably, and unspeakably beyond your largest notions of what God is up to?

We really shouldn’t sing our song of response unless our answer to those questions is “yes,” because we’re committing to something when we sing, “Blessed be Your name, Lord.” We’re preparing ourselves for the day when calamity hits us to respond the way Job did on the day of his calamity. Let’s offer to God our lives and our worship. He is worthy. Amen.

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