

IT'S NOT OVER TILL HE SAYS IT'S OVER

The last two years have been interesting for all of us. Challenging us, stretching us in more ways than one. But what if a calamity fell on you in one day. Imagine being in the city of Pompeii when Mount Vesuvius erupted, or being in Hiroshima or Nagasaki when the bomb was dropped, or being on the Titanic and hearing that awful sound of metal grating alongside an iceberg. What do you do?

One terrible day can change everything. One bad moment can even start a chain of heartbreaking events, even plunge you into a dark season. Some of you have gone through dark seasons in your life and some of you might even be in one right now. I think our nation can say we've been going through a lot of disasters these last few years and it's been dark for a lot of people.

I want to start by reading to you an amazing story from the Bible this morning. And if you have your bibles, turn to Job chapter 1.

There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. ² There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. ³ He possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys, and very many servants, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east. ⁴ His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. ⁵ And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually.

⁶ Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. ⁷ The Lord said to Satan, "From where have you come?" Satan answered the Lord and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." ⁸ And the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" ⁹ Then Satan answered the Lord and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason? ¹⁰ Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. ¹¹ But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face." ¹² And the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand." So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.

¹³ Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, ¹⁴ and there came a messenger to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, ¹⁵ and the Sabeans fell upon them and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." ¹⁶ While he was yet speaking, there came another 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.”¹⁷ While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, “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.”¹⁸ 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,¹⁹ and 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.”

²⁰ Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. ²¹ And he said, “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.”

²² In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.

Verse one says that Job was an upright man, a righteous man, and verse 22 shows us that through all of this calamity, he didn’t sin and he didn’t charge God or blame God with wrong.

I have set myself a very difficult task this morning because many of you know that Job is a big book. It’s 40 chapters long and there’s a lot to be said from this book. The 17th century puritan pastor Joseph Caryl preached 424 sermons over 30 years, all from the book of Job. So there is a lot to be said from this book and the task that I have set for myself is to teach the whole story to you this morning.

Obviously I am going to be drawing with a very broad brush. I am going to be giving highlights of this story, the jet tour from about 30,000 feet, picking the main points.

Job is one of the oldest stories in the human history. The events in this book occurred before the life of Moses, so the story dates back before the first five books of the bible were written. A lot of scholars believe that it was written down in its current form during the reign of King Solomon. But it undoubtedly was a well-known story that had been passed down from generation to generation before that. And let’s be clear that this is part of the Bible so God preserved the story and we can be confident that it is an accurate retelling of the story that actually took place.

When you pick up a bible, you find Job somewhere in the middle of your bible, but chronologically, Job belongs much earlier in the history, maybe as far back as between chapters 11 & 12 of Genesis. Somewhere perhaps between the story of the Tower of Babel and the call of Abraham is where this man Job lived in those ancient days.

So it’s one of the most ancient stories in the world, but what’s it about? It’s about the problem of suffering. Now that’s significant, isn’t it. Kingdoms rise, kingdoms fall, fashions change, technology seems to advance but the human condition has not been altered in thousands of years. We are today the same hurting, broken lost race that we were the very day when Adam and Eve fell from grace and were banished from God’s presence. And that’s why the bible is still as relevant and timely as it has ever been over thousands of years. Like no other book, it is relevant and it gives understanding and

answers to the great issues of life. It makes sense of human history, it makes sense of the human condition.

Both Pastor Don and I have books in our libraries that are celebrated when they are released, and for 2-3 years, everyone talks about them and recommends them, then they just gather dust and they just disappear and are forgotten, but not so with the bible. This book for thousands of years, has been a light, has been a guide because it's not like other books. This is God's word, and He told us about the problem of suffering.

So this is the opening scene, this is how it kicks off. Job was an extremely wealthy man. It goes through all of his possessions. This guy was rich but he was righteous with it. He wasn't some rich person, who felt independent and ignored God, he was a righteous man and was blessed by God. Unbeknownst to him, something took place in the spiritual realm, there was a meeting that he didn't know anything about. No one on earth knew anything about this meeting. A meeting between God and Satan and you heard that little exchange there. Satan came before God and God said, "Where have you been?" And Satan said, "I have been roaming too and fro across all the earth." And God said, "While you were down there, did you see that guy, Job? What a servant of mine, he is. What a righteous man he is." Satan says "Yeah, he's righteous. He's righteous because of how good you have been to him. You put a hedge around him."

Isn't that lovely to think that God does actually put hedges around people? That people are in the centre of God's providence and protection and Satan recognized that. And you know what? I believe that we as God's people, we are in the centre of God's providence and protection and we only experience what God allows us to go through. God is protecting his people and Satan said "That's why, but I tell you this right now, you let him go through some hardship, you let him go through some tough days, you let him lose some of that stuff he's got and he will curse you to your face."

God said, "Alright Satan, have at it, just don't touch him. Just leave him alone but you can touch everything else that he's got." And then we go through this incredible sequence of trials that Job faced, in a single day it all began, a disastrous day. A messenger comes running to Job and says, "Your oxen, your donkeys and the servants who were watching over them, were all attacked by marauders and they're all gone!"

And Job is reeling from that and thinking, "We've got to deal with this" and all of a sudden, a second messenger runs in. And the second messenger says "Job, fire fell out of heaven and burned all your sheep and all your shepherds. Two disasters in one day, and then a third messenger runs in. There's another band of marauders, not just the Sabeans but the Chaldeans attacked and took all the camels and killed more of your servants."

And then the worst news of all, a fourth messenger runs in and says, "A great wind blew and collapsed your eldest son's house, and all 10 of your children were inside and were killed."

I would say this qualifies as a bad day, I don't think you've ever experienced as bad a day as that. I know I haven't. Some dark days, sure, but this is biggest bad day in the world. Then verse 20 says that Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head (which they did in ancient times when they

went into a season of mourning) and fell on the ground, but immediately his heart turned to worshipping God.

What unfolds if you know the story is the record of this man's faith in God through an unbelievable set of trials. His friends, even his own wife, they criticized him. They called him and his faith into question. None of them knew about the meeting in heaven, none of them knew what was going on, they all brought their opinions. But in the end, the trials came to a conclusion, and Job emerged with his faith intact, still looking to God, still trusting and in the end of the story, God blessed Job so that he had twice as much wealth as he had in the beginning.

Ten more children, but a lost child can never be replaced, but God did bless him with 10 more children. God gave him back because of his faithfulness.

This morning, I want to quickly look at some lessons from Job and the first lesson is this:

1) BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GODLY PEOPLE

You may have heard this said before, "Bad things happen to good people" but I've got news for you, there ain't none of those. Sorry. Only God is good. He has given us the righteousness of His Son, Jesus, when he saved us, and he is working on our character and our lives but we all fail miserably.

But bad things happen to Godly people. People who are seeking God, people who love God, people who are trying to live their lives for his honour. Would you note with me that the subject of the book of Job is actually more specific than the problem of suffering. The book is really about one aspect about that great subject. The question before us in Job isn't just "Why Suffering," it's "Why do the godly suffer?" And there's some reasons that the book of Job tells us.

So if you've had a hard time, you want to hear this, right? Well, firstly:

A) THE GODLY MAY SUFFER BECAUSE WE ARE NOT YET GLORIFIED

What does that mean? It means that at the end of our lives, those who are trusting in God are going to come to the place where either through death or because God ends human history and returns, either way, we are going to be ushered into his presence and the bible says in that moment we will be glorified. A body that will never decay, never tire, never wear out, but also your sin bias from being born in a lost world will be taken away so we no longer have those compulsions. God's going to remove evil and have us in his presence, worshipping him forever.

But that hasn't yet happened so we live in a fallen world and you better understand that. We live in a fallen world and Christians are not absolved from the heartaches of living in a fallen world. But listen to what Job says later in the book in chapter 19. He said

"For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. (He believed that God was coming back, he believed that God was going to restore Eden. They

had a promise right from the days of Adam and Eve and he knew about it.) **[26] And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, [27] whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!**” (Job 25:19:25-27)

God is invisible in our lifetime as he was in Job’s but he knew that he would see his God. One day he would come into his presence and there are three fascinating things here that Job understands. And if you think that people in Old Testament times didn’t have much understanding, I want to show you how much understanding Job had. It’s extraordinary knowledge of God.

Firstly, he understood that things are not right in the world. You don’t have to be a genius to figure that out but he knew that God is going to put them right. The redeemer will come and be the sovereign ruler of all. This is what he said. **“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth.”**

Secondly, he knew that the present suffering we are going through, no matter how severe they may be, they are temporary for God’s people. He said **“After my skin has been thus destroyed,”** see how he’s really referring to all the troubles we go through as surface things, not intensely deep things. The spirit of man is a whole other ballgame. He says, when my skin is gone, **“yet in my flesh I shall see God.”** God’s going to raise us up in the resurrection. **“Whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.”** He said, everything that is happening to me is temporary.

And thirdly, he knew that his hopes must be set on that reality and not his present suffering. He said, **“My heart faints (or yearns) within me!”** He was looking for that future day when God would finally take him to himself.

So the godly may suffer because we are not yet glorified, we are living between the glory and the flame. We are living in a difficult time.

B) THE GODLY MAY SUFFER BECAUSE WE HAVE AN ENEMY

We live in a fallen world generally but specifically the godly may suffer because we have a very real enemy. Go back to chapter one and read those opening scenes where Satan, the enemy of our souls, the adversary of God and his people, came before God seeking permission to test Job.

In Job’s understanding, he didn’t know about that meeting, everything was coming seemingly out of nowhere. But it was not coincidence, it was not bad luck, Job had an unseen enemy and that enemy is our enemy.

Do you think the devil has given up? Do you think he has stopped opposing God’s family? Listen to the Apostle Peter in 1 Peter chapter 5. He says to every one of us:

“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (remember what we read in the book of

Job? God says “where have you been?” “walking to and fro across the face of the earth. Here Peter says he’s still doing it) ***the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. [9] Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.” (1 Peter 5:8-9)***

We’re all in the same boat. We all go through hardship and trial so resist the devil. Peter was no stranger to Satan’s attempts, was he? Remember the night of the last supper, when Jesus was about to go to the cross, Jesus warned Peter, he said “Satan has asked for you that he may sift you like wheat.”

In those times, they would bring in the wheat harvest and would stick in the winnowing forks and throw them up in the air, and the chaff would be blown away and the grain would fall down but it’s a violent process throwing it up in the air. Jesus said “Peter, Satan has asked to do that to you.” It’s another confrontation like Job, and Jesus said “but listen, I’ve prayed for you, Peter, you’re going to make it and when you do, you’ll be an encouragement to your brothers.

Peter had gone through it and he says we need to be sober-minded and vigilant so that we will come through the trials.

C) THE GODLY MAY SUFFER BECAUSE WE ARE BEING TESTED AND DEVELOPED

God allows difficulties in our life to produce something. Your pain, your difficulty is never wasted if you’re a child of God. God makes it purposeful. The same thing might happen to somebody else and just seem meaningless, but if it happens in your life, God will use it for his glory. That was what was going on with Job wasn’t it? It was all part of a test, he didn’t know about the arrangements but he was being tested and coming through that test brought glory to God which is the number one purpose of every trial, to bring God glory.

And it developed him in his faith. Every one of us, when you’ve been through some tests in life, you look back and you see what God has done in you. What he’s made in your life because you’ve trusted him, you’ve hung on to him.

I can tell you something right now, Job at the end of that book is a different Job than the guy who started. As righteous and godly as he was at the beginning, he got some experience he didn’t have before and he’s proven the faithfulness of God in wonderful new ways. That’s what God wants to do in all of our lives.

So there are three reasons why we may have difficulties in our life. We may suffer because we’re not yet glorified, we’re living in a fallen world. We may suffer because we have an enemy, Satan. And we may suffer because we are being tested and being developed. God is wanting to make us even stronger than we were before. Here’s the point, Godly people experience bad things.

2) WE ARE NOT PRIVY TO MUCH OF GOD’S PLAN

The bible tells us a lot of stuff about what God is doing in the world but you know what, there's a lot of things that they're behind the curtain, that we are not privy to, the way that God works and the things that God is doing. We are meant to see in this book that there was an explanation for what was happening to Job even though Job and his friends did not know it. That scene between God and Satan, that explains it, but they didn't know that.

At least a little extra information in your life would change your perspective, wouldn't it? If you were going through a very difficult season, a hard trial and all of a sudden, you got a vision from God granting you permission to be tested, you would face that trial a little bit differently. Or if the end of the struggle was revealed, if you're going through a really hard time right now and God showed you five years from now when he's worked and things have come through that and now you see the strength you have in your life. That would change how you run the race, how you go through the difficulty.

Job didn't have any of that. He couldn't pick up a copy of the Bible and turn to the book of Job and say, "What's going to happen? Oh my goodness, let me get to chapter 40 and see what's going to happen at the end." The book hadn't been written. He's living his life with blinders on, just exactly like you and me.

That's us. It's where we live and we walk by faith. God is as wise and loving in his reservations as he is in his revelations. I thank God that I don't know everything that is coming, because some things that have happened in my life, if I'd had known ahead of time, I would have been paralyzed with fear. Some things that came along in my life, not knowing that they were coming was a blessing. When they came, I hung onto God and he got me through to the other side.

He reveals enough to give our faith intelligence but he holds back enough to give our faith the room to be developed and to grow. God is a wise father and we are not privy to a lot of his plans. Let me give you another lesson.

3) WELL-MEANING PEOPLE CAN GIVE YOU LOUSY ADVICE

Job had three friends that we meet in this book, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zofar. Never was it more truly said in the world than it was of these guys, "With friends like this, who needs enemies." These were three pieces of work and what they said to Job in the midst of his calamity is interesting because it includes all the normal menu of things that sincere people say today when a friend is going through a hard time.

We first meet these three characters at the end of chapter 2 and we instantly recognize that they did in fact want to help their friend Job. He was their buddy, they liked him and they felt very badly for him. Listen to what it says in Job 2:11 – 13:

"Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that had come upon him, they came each from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They made an appointment together to come to show him sympathy and comfort him." ¹² And when they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize

him. And they raised their voices and wept, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads toward heaven. ¹³ And they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.”

Notice that, they didn't say anything at first, they sat there and wept. If they had left it at that and not opened their mouths, it would have been great but they opened their mouths and spoiled it. Sometimes the greatest ministry that you can provide to a hurting person is just the ministry of presence, just to be there for them. Not try to solve all the riddles for them, just be there with them, with your hand upon their shoulder.

I think those first seven days were a great ministry to Job, but then they started talking. They poured out the well-meaning platitudes and simplistic assessments and advice that you normally hear. Let's face it, what you read in the book of Job, a lot of it is conventional wisdom. If you saw a person who in one day, lost all their livestock and their servants to marauders, they lost 10 of their children in a freak windstorm demolishing their son's house, and then if that guy was suddenly struck with boils all over his body as it goes on to say happened to Job, you'd probably think "Man, this guy's cursed" and you would wonder what he's been up to for all this bad stuff to come on him.

You'd probably end up saying "maybe it's time you got down to the altar on a Sunday and pray because something is wrong in your life. You must be really badly sinning for that to happen." There are a lot of people who are very willing to jump to judgments and give advice to hurting people.

I'm not suggesting that good friends can't give us good and helpful counsel in tough times. The bible says there's wisdom in a multitude of counselors. There are moments where you really need someone to give you some help and some counsel but my caution is to all of us that when we see someone going through a time of trial, it's way too easy to want to jump in, diagnose complex situations, offer simplistic answers when we really don't have all the information.

J. Sidlow Baxter said *"Between the prologue of Job, which shows how Job's trial originated in heaven and the epilogue which shows how Job's trial eventuated in enrichment and blessing, we have a group of patriarchal wise acers theorizing and dogmatizing from incomplete premises and deficient data."*

That's what the book of Job is. If you are going through a tough time this morning, whoever you are, my friend, a good and dear person to you may be able to offer a timely word but just be thankful for their presence most of all. And keep your head, whatever advice may be given to you, test everything by God's word, take your trouble to the Lord and seek him in his word. He can show you if something is wrong or if it's just life in a fallen world. He can show you and he can give you strength and courage to endure.

Nice people can give you lousy advice.

4) GOD DOESN'T NEED OUR OPINIONS OR COUNSEL

This is very hard for us to hear. Imagine if you heard someone saying it to a person going through a terrible trial like Job went through, you'd wince, wouldn't you. If you heard someone say, "You know what? God doesn't need your opinion. God doesn't need your counsel."

Imagine someone in a desperate time, pleading with God and hearing God say "I don't need your opinion. I don't need your counsel." That sounds harsh, but guess what, you get to chapter 38 and that's exactly what God said to Job, lovingly, as a father. Job 38:4 – 6:

"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. [5] Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? [6] On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone,"

I'm sure you have heard people, as I have heard people, going through a hard trial and in their prayers, and listen, I've been guilty of it myself, trying to counsel God. Me or a loved one or a friend is going through a hard time and I say, "God, if you would just do this, and then do that and if you would take care of this situation, if you would just grant this healing and then convince that person and then get them a new job and surround them with these people, this is how you fix it all, God." And God says "Really?"

And God said to Job, "Oh really? Thanks for your help, but I really don't need it." God has wisdom far beyond ours and he knows exactly what is going on and we don't know the half of it. We've got to trust him. That might sound harsh but it's not harsh at all.

God's not angry with Job. God is delighting in Job. God is speaking as the one who knows the end from the beginning. He's correcting Job because he knows the deliverance that he is shortly about to bring. There's tremendous comfort that comes to us when we realize God doesn't need our advice. When we recognize his great omniscience and wisdom, we can trust him and rest in the knowledge that he's in control.

Does that mean you shouldn't pray? No, pour out your heart to God, he wants to hear your prayer but leave the answer to him. Job doesn't feel beaten down by God, he's been adjusted, that's all. He's been helped. His response in chapter 40 is "I lay my hand over my mouth." That's what Job said right at the end, "I lay my hand over my mouth." He said, I'm going to shut up now, God." Good idea, Job.

Don't stop praying, but tell God the problem, not the solution, that's up to him.

5) WHEN GOD SAYS "ENOUGH!", EVERYTHING CHANGES

This is the bit you've been waiting for. When God says "Enough!", everything changes. You get right to the end of the book in Job 42:10, it says:

"And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before."

He was already the richest man in the East, God gave him so much more. It doesn't mean that if you obey God, he's going to make you rich, but it does mean he rewards obedience and he has got the answers in his great hands.

Listen to me very clearly, whoever you are. Satan is not in control of your destiny. If you are a child of God, Jesus Christ is in control of your destiny. One of the most striking things about the book of Job is the powerlessness of Satan to do anything without God's permission. God's in control.

If you want dualism, where God and the devil are fighting it out in this great battle, that's Star Wars, it's not the Bible. That's good force and the bad force, that's not the Bible. In the bible, God is in sovereign and absolute total control. Satan has no power unless God allows it. That's it, all the time.

The book opens with Satan being summoned into God's presence, don't miss that. When God tells Satan to report to him, he comes. And Satan can't touch one of God's children unless God allows it. You are safe in God's hands today. And if he is allowing you to go through a tough time, trust him. He is accomplishing great things though it for his glory and your good. That's the promise of God's word. And the moment he says it's over, it'll be over. It may be here on earth or it may not be till eternity, but the moment he says it's over, it's over.

Let's pray.