

Sermon- Embracing the Test

Scripture: Job 1&2

Sunday, March 29, 2020

Today I am going to start a sermon series on the book of Job. Few things about this book before we get into the weeds. Firstly, the book of Job is one of the oldest books of the Bible. It is written in the genre of Hebrew poetry and is part of the Wisdom literature of the Bible. And speaking of literature, this book is considered one of the finest pieces of literature anywhere in the world. This book grapples with one of the biggest questions of human life, is God just? In terms of setting, the author gives us no clues about either date or place. This is a deliberate choice so as not to distract the reader from the relevance of its message that must not be confined by location or time period. Some people wrestle with the question, is Job a real person? This is equivalent to asking, was the Prodigal Son a real person? Well, the prodigal son was not a reference to any one person but at the same time is a reference to all of us. So is Job. He represents the concept of innocent suffering, something that we all experience even though we are not innocent in every aspect of life like Jesus was.

Let me also introduce the structure of the book. Well, this book has a very clear and simple to understand structure. There is a prologue consisting of chapter 1 and 2 that sets up the story for us. Then there is the dialogue between Job and his friends, spanning chapters 3-37. Chapters 38-41 cover God's response to Job. The final chapter is Job's response to God and Job's restoration. I will not cover this book like I was going through the Gospel of John. Rather, I will be covering conceptual sections of it so as to cover the whole book in probably a 7 part series. That is the rough plan as of now. This may get finetuned as I go along.

For today, we will look at chapters one and two. In these two chapters we are introduced to an exceptional human being. He is one of the richest people in the land. But he is also tremendously righteous. He was considered blameless by God. It does not get better than that! As an illustration of his righteousness, we are told that he even regularly made sacrificial offerings even for those sins that his children may have unknowingly committed. So Job is presented to us as a man who has all the possible bases of his life covered.

After this introduction, we are taken via a split screen into a very different kind of setting. We are taken into something called the divine council. Let me explain this. In a few places in the Bible we are told that around the throne of God, God gathers from time to time a council of beings that are referred to as gods with a small “g” or sometimes as children of the Most High. These are beings who have responsibility for ruling different parts of the earth. Ps 82 provides a bit of an elaboration although much of this is left as a mystery. But what we are told is that Satan the accuser came to this divine council too. This would be before His fall. At this particular meeting, God and Satan have a most incredible conversation. This conversation is the crux of what we are going to look at today so let’s examine this carefully.

God asks Satan what he has been up to. Satan replies that he has been patrolling the earth seeing everything that is going on. To that God then asks Satan, ***“have you seen by servant Job? Have you noticed my servant Job? He is the finest man in all the earth. He is blameless—a man of complete integrity. He fears God and stays away from evil”***. To that Satan then replies, ***“Yes, but Job has good reason to fear God. ¹⁰ You have always put a wall of protection around him and his home and his property. You have made him prosper in everything he does. Look how rich he is! ¹¹ But reach out and take away everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face!”***

So what Satan is telling God is that Job only obeys God because Job is being extremely well taken care of materially and at the same time protected from all of life's problems. Satan then bets against Job and tells God that if God removes his blessings, Job will in fact turn against God and curse God to His face.

Before we go on in the story, we need to stop the narrative and deal with something really critical to understanding Job. We need to understand what it means to curse God. While the Bible does not spell this out to a T, Lev 24:14-16 does talk about cursing God. It was considered blasphemy and the punishment for it was being stoned to death. In Rev 16:11 when the angels are pouring out the 7 bowls of God's wrath on the people, twice the people are said to be cursing God. In verse 9 it says, ***⁹Everyone was burned by this blast of heat, and they cursed the name of God, who had control over all these plagues. They did not repent of their sins and turn to God and give him glory.***

So let me elaborate on what is going on. Firstly, to curse a human being is to invoke the power of God to bring harm to a human being. This is the worst you can do to a human. This level of harm is to completely reject the possibility of a relationship with this human being. So what does it mean to curse God then. Human beings may not have the capacity to harm God but human beings have the capacity to terminate the possibility of a relationship with God. So you see for a child of God to curse God is to shift dramatically in one's tone and posture towards God. In Job's case for example, by cursing God, Job would move from having a relationship of intimacy, reverence, obedience and dependence on God to something very different. To curse would be to mistrust, to blame, to negatively label and to rebel. You see cursing God is not just an expression of anger towards God. You can express anger towards God or anyone without bringing into question the validity of the relationship you have with that person. Cursing is about crossing a line that says the relationship no longer sustainable. You see this in the statement Job's wife makes. She tells him to curse God and die. Even she

understands that by asking Job to terminate his relationship with God is asking him to die some kind of death. It is like what Adam and Eve were told, eat of the forbidden fruit and you will die.

Couple of other postures towards God that fall in this realm of cursing God. When our words or actions towards God are as if God has intended to harm us, that is cursing God. Even in Rev 16 when the angels are pouring out God's wrath on the people, Gods' intention is that they repent and be blessed. God's intention is never to harm. But the people instead of seeing God's good intention take it as God intending to harm them and respond by cursing God. We can also, out of our anger towards God treat God as if He does not exist. Most atheists are in this category.

Just to clarify, you can only terminate relationships you have. So if someone has never had the privilege of having a relationship with God in the first place because their life journey has not taken them to that point yet, they cannot in any real sense curse God and die. Also you can only reject God when God has become real to you and so the choice is real as well. It is only when you are in a relationship that you have the possibility of destroying it. It is only when you actually meet someone if there a possibility of walking away.

Cursing God is the line that Job is commended for not crossing at the end of the book and that is the line that we have to make sure we never cross, no matter what happens to us. So be very clear about the line that is never to be crossed with God.

So the question then is, what does Job do when everything precious to him is taken away and the temptation to cross the line with God is blazingly intense? In Job's first test when his children are killed and all his wealth has gone, Job makes a very profound statement. He says,

***“I came naked from my mother’s womb,
and I will be naked when I leave.***

***The Lord gave me what I had,
and the Lord has taken it away.***

Praise the name of the Lord!”

When Job is tested again with his own health, He says, ***“Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad?”***.

When you look at these statements what Job is saying is, God does not owe me anything. Everything I have was given to me by God. He can give and he can take away. Blessed be His name. God may deal you a good hand or a terrible hand. But in the game of life God gets to distribute the cards. We have to receive from His hand because as Creator He gets to decide what is best for us. And no matter what hand He has dealt us, He has made a provision for us to win. So why object to the hand you are dealt with, right?

In both of Job’s responses to the calamities that came to him, Job never compromises his reverent posture towards God. Job never doubts God’s intentions towards Him and Job never forgets the many good things that he enjoyed from God. And so whether on a high or low, Job was acknowledging that life was a test and he was willing to embrace the tests God was throwing at him.

This idea of embracing the tests are not unique to the book of Job. You see it across the Bible. In Ps 66:10 New Living Translation (NLT) the Psalmist declares

***¹⁰ You have tested us, O God;
you have purified us like silver.***

In the book of James 1:2-4 it says

² Dear brothers and sisters,^[a] when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. ³ For you know that when your faith is tested, your

endurance has a chance to grow. ⁴ So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

In 1 Peter 1:6 New Living Translation (NLT)

⁶ So be truly glad.^[a] There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while.

Now, the question is, why should the trials in your life make you truly glad? James 1 elaborates on this.

James 1:12

¹² God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

The reason why you and I should gladly embrace the tests in our life is because we have some amazing promises from God for those who do.

The first is that those who endure the testing and temptations will receive the crown of life or eternal life.

Now you might say, wait a minute. I thought we get eternal life the moment we say yes to Christ and say the sinners prayer! Well that is crusade Christianity not Biblical Christianity. Let me clarify. When someone says they have accepted Christ, they are declaring that they are making Jesus Christ the Lord and Savior of their life after forsaking all other lords and saviors. The problem is this. We human beings can only truly speak for the moment we are in. When someone accepts Christ, the only thing you can truly say about that person is that they have declared Jesus Christ to be their Lord and Savior at that moment. And usually at that moment, they are in the safety of a church or some place and usually there are no challenges to that decision at that very

moment. The rest of their life has not been lived yet. What twists and turns await them, is something that only God knows. So the fact is we do not know if a particular individual will over the course of their lifetime continue to rely upon Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. We do not know that even about ourselves. But here is the thing. Every test and trial in our life is an opportunity to demonstrate that Jesus Christ is still the Lord and Savior of our life. And every time we pass a test, God has just increased our capacity to follow Christ.

Look at what Deuteronomy 8:2-3 New Living Translation (NLT) says,

² Remember how the Lord your God led you through the wilderness for these forty years, humbling you and testing you to prove your character, and to find out whether or not you would obey his commands. ³ Yes, he humbled you by letting you go hungry and then feeding you with manna, a food previously unknown to you and your ancestors. He did it to teach you that people do not live by bread alone; rather, we live by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

With every test God is building our character and helping us learn to depend on the Word of God in a deeper and deeper way. So with every test, God is increasing our capacity to follow him and gradually reducing the probability that we will fall off the wagon 😊 as he molds us into the image of Christ.

So as we begin this journey in Job, I hope we can remember that in the trials of life, there are lines we must never cross. On the other hand, within those lines, as we face tests big and small, scriptures say rejoice in them. Because God's intentions for us are nothing less than making us more like Jesus and giving us the crown of eternal life.

So like Job, I hope we can say with all sincerity, God gives and God takes away. Blessed be the name of our Lord. Rejoice my friends God is making something beautiful out of us. Let us pray.