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# Job learns about God

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 6 October 2024

Job 1:1, 2:1-10 • Hebrews 2:5-12 • Mark 10:13-16

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May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

The Book of Job is one of the great books of the Bible. It tells the story of Job, a truly righteous and faithful man, to whom God has given great prosperity, a large family, and many possessions. His worth is recognised by God, and God extols his virtues to the fallen angel Satan. Satan dismisses God's praise of Job, saying it is only because God has been so good to Job that he worships God. Take away all these blessings, his home, his children, his flocks, says Satan, and Job will curse you. God disagrees, but allows Satan to put it to the test, twice.

Our reading today tells of Satan's second test. In the first one, Satan kills Job's family, servants and flocks, but Job retains his faith in God. So Satan tries again, and again with God's permission, he attacks Job personally, causing his skin to break out in painful sores all over his body. Job's wife says:

“You are still as faithful as ever, aren't you? Why don't you curse God and die?”

<sup>10</sup> Job answered, “You are talking nonsense! When God sends us something good, we welcome it. How can we complain when he sends us trouble?” Even in all this suffering Job said nothing against God. (Job 2:9-10)

Job's attitude here is one of acceptance of God's actions: taking the bad with the good. Job has received much in the way of good, in his wife, many children, large flocks, servants and lands. He is well-respected among his people. He has indeed welcomed many good things from God. And now that it has all been taken away from him, he is surprisingly calm about it. His wife can't understand it. She thinks he should be angry with God. “Why don't you curse God and die?” Give up, she says. Your faith is in vain. But Job keeps his faith — although in the following chapters he begins to question.

Is Job right to feel this way? Job would seem to be following the advice which Paul later gave in his first letter to the Thessalonians:

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thess 5:16-18)

Job is perhaps not actually giving thanks for the death and ruin Satan has brought on him; but he accepts it. It is the will of God. “The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away.” It is a philosophy which has much to recommend it, although it is hardly satisfying to one who is suffering greatly. “The will of God” suggests that God has a plan for us, which we cannot now understand. Job seems to accept this, yet he soon begins to wonder what he has done to make God want to punish him.

There has long been a belief, which the ancient Jews held, that God punishes people for their sins by sending sickness or hardship upon them. Does the Book of Job challenge this belief? Job is specifically described in our passage today as “a good man, careful not to do anything evil.” God says, “There is no one on earth as faithful and good as he is.” And then God allows Satan to test Job to see if he will remain faithful, when all but his life is taken away. By a plain reading of the text, there are no sins to be punished here. Job is being tested. And he seems to pass, as he retains his faith. Throughout the rest of the book, Job argues with his friends who tell him that he must have sinned in order for God to have ruined him. Job rejects their arguments, maintaining his innocence.

He tells his friends that God is angry with him: “God assails and tears me in his anger and gnashes his teeth at me” (Job 16:9) In increasing frustration he begins to demand of God that God meet with him and present the case against him:

I say to God: do not declare me guilty, but tell me what charges you have against me. (10:2)

I sign now my defence — let the Almighty answer me: let my accuser put his indictment in writing! (31:35)

In anger, while all the time asserting God's power, Job demands that God explain to him why he has been so afflicted.

Finally his friends give up, and then — the Lord answers:

Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him! (40:1,2)

God speaks — for four chapters, God speaks. God tells Job that it is God who laid the earth's foundation, established the borders of the seas, created all life, sends good weather and storms, and is king over all the world. Job is humbled before the Lord, and replies, "I am unworthy ... I will say no more" (40:4,5). Yet God also praises Job, as he chastises his friends, saying that they "have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has" (42:7).

What are we to conclude? Clearly, God does not have to explain his actions to us. God invites us into Communion with him, and wants us to know him, but it is not like a human relationship, between equals. God retains sovereignty and God's ways are not ultimately open to question. God's knowledge is so infinitely beyond ours that we will never be in a position to legitimately question what God does. He does not automatically punish wrongdoing, and although God may punish us if he chooses to do so, we may also suffer hardship without having sinned. This is the main thrust of the arguments Job's friends put forward, that Job was suffering because of his sins. Indeed, Job was blameless (1:1) until he began to question God's authority. Now, Job has learned his place in God's world. God's actions are always correct, for God cannot do wrong. That is a lesson which may be difficult to accept, when we look around at the broken world around us. But it is at the centre of our faith. God is worthy of our worship because God is perfect.

There is much else which could be said about the Book of Job, and I urge you to read it for yourself. Like all of the Bible, it teaches us a little bit more about our wonderful, merciful, great and awesome God. Bless us, O Lord, and help us to know you better; through your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.