

## The Summer Soul: Job

8.27.17

Text: Job 1:1-22



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**Reflection questions...** [please consider the teaching notes, first, as a basis of your reflections]

*“What do you think about when you hear the name Job? Suffering? Injustice? Faith?”*

*“What are some of the questions about life and God that your consideration of Job has prompted? Have you been satisfied with the answers?”*

*“How would you describe, ‘fear of the LORD’?”*

*“Do your considerations of the life of Job cause you to reflect on times in your own life where you have struggled with ambiguity... the tension of ‘not knowing’? How did it make your response more challenging?”*

*“Are there things you know about God, now, that would allow you to respond to adversity in a healthier way?”*

*“How have you found comfort in the faithful presence and powerful silence of your friends? Have you discovered that words often cheapen the moment?”*

*“Would you rather have a God that you could explain or one that you could trust?”*

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## Teaching Notes...

*Cher. Bono. Beyoncé. Prince.* Imagine having the notoriety where you are recognized by a single name. **“Job”**. But, imagine, also, that your name was synonymous with tragedy. Job is the “poster-boy” (spokesperson) for human suffering.

*“There once was a man named Job, who lived in the land of Uz”,* or, *“in a land far, far away...”* We have no other book that starts like this, so you are immediately met with some type of determination about the literary style and its purpose.

Job is part of the collection of writings known as the “Wisdom Literature”. It involves writings, both biblical and extra-biblical, which reflect the commonality of humanity’s pursuit (even if we cannot find consensus on the means of such pursuit): *“What does it mean to live well? What is the good life?”*

Wisdom (*chokmah*), as literally interpreted, means ‘*shrewdness, prudence, skill*’. It is, quite literally, the art of living skillfully. The art of living well.

Wisdom involves the best of human experience (beauty, celebration, robust relationships, etc.) and the worst of human experience (senseless violence, abuse, disease, dysfunctionality, etc.) Neither is excluded. Both are offered as the arena/domain in which God is present and active among us. It means that all of life counts.

What distinguishes biblical wisdom is that it is centered in the “*fear of the LORD*” (Proverbs 9:10). “*Fear of the LORD*” is the stock, biblical phrase for the awareness that we are not ‘self-explanatory’ and that the resources for living well, are not to be found in our own strategies and determinations. The wise are learning to defer to God in all matters of life.

**Without writings like Job, we actually run the risk of developing a faith that attempts to ‘avoid’ reality, rather than one that allows us to respond well to it.**

Job is a complicated piece of Hebrew literature that cannot be approached simplistically. It is offered as an epic story and not as some doctrinal treatise (e.g. we are not meant to formulate some air-tight doctrine about ‘the Satan’ and the methodologies of spiritual warfare). Instead, it serves to set up the story before us, the individual characters, and their various responses.

Chapters 1-2 serve as the “**prologue**”, which sets up the remainder of the story. As the book begins, we are immediately drawn in by the intrigue. There is this strange, cosmic, scene where God is depicted in this “*situation room*”, of sorts; this place from where he maintains his awareness and brings forth his decisions/determinations. It was a scene/concept which would have been familiar to the Jewish mindset.

It is a near-eastern way of expressing the reality of the gods--- the spirits--- which were responsible for everything that humans experience, whether interpreted as good/beneficial or bad/disorderly.

There is, then, this exchange between God and “*the satan*” (“*one who accuses or opposes*”; “*an adversary*”). In the OT, he is not yet given his personal name, “Satan”, but he is offered as a powerful, created being who stands in opposition to God’s authority and determinations.

“*Where have you been?*” (1:7). Unlike the other created beings who carry out God’s will, he operates independent of God and seems to be one from whom God needs to protect his people (1:10).

“*Have you considered my servant Job?*” [Interestingly, in an “honor-shame” culture, this is a challenge. The only way to deal with a challenge is to put it to the test so that you might be proven to be in the right.]

At this point, you are thinking either: 1) God is some kind of “cosmic-sadist” who gets some twisted pleasure from watching people suffer, or, 2) God knows something about Job that Job doesn’t know, and Job will eventually know something about God that he doesn’t currently

(2) accusations/challenges by “*the satan*”:

1) Job doesn’t love you for you. He only loves you because you cater to him and coddle him.

2) You manipulate people in order to get what you want! They aren't really free to choose you. Take away their 'perks' and you eliminate humanity's motivation for knowing and interacting with you.

God demonstrates that he will not be "double-dog-dared", so he accepts the challenge. If Job fails, it would suggest that the accusations are valid. If Job succeeds, then it would silence any accusations about God's character and the way he runs the world.

In this process, Job, rather unsuspectingly, experiences a series of losses and excruciating adversity. Someone stole his car, his business and employees went up in flames, his dog died, a tornado wiped out his kids and... how about some boils! *"Are you kidding me?"* It's like watching, **"Unbroken"**: surely that's the worst that could happen, right?

All Job is left with is his wife which, in this case, is of little comfort. Her advice, as from any mother who has just witnessed the wholesale elimination of her children and all that she holds dear--- and believes God to be responsible: *"Give God the finger and die!"*

In chapter 3, Job delivers the most disturbing birthday speech ever given! *"Let the day of my birth be erased... let that night be blotted off the calendar to never appear again among the months... Curse the day for failing to shut my mother's womb. Why wasn't I born dead?"*

This dude is not in a good place. He is seriously depressed. Hallmark just does not make a birthday card to capture this kind of sentiment!

Then, the bulk of the narrative (ch.3-37) includes what is called the "cycles". It's this heated debate between Job and his friends, about evil and God's role in it (theodicy). *"Is this a moral universe? Do my choices matter? Do I have choices? Does everyone simply get what they deserve? What kind of world am I living in where I can be fully committed to doing the right things, yet experience such seemingly purposeless tragedy, as a result? What would we infer about life? What would we presume to be true of God?"*

Job's friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar) see his FB posts, notice that he has "unfriended God", and rush to his location to find him bald, dirty, and bummed. As is the case with many sincere, Christian friends, their consolation quickly turns into an intervention.

They arrive with their clichéd responses and pad theology, which not only contributes to the haze, but insensitively dismisses their feelings. Job refers to them as *"worthless quacks"* and *"miserable comforters"* (13:4; 16:2). He eventually 'tunes them out', altogether.

Job's Options: 1) dismiss God, altogether, which would not eliminate the suffering, but would resolve the soul-tension, 2) accept the evaluation of his friends, which would somehow resolve the issue 'theologically', but still be left with this gnawing uneasiness about the character of God.

This is not a faith that is "simple", but "simplistic". It hasn't wrestled with the seeming inequities and maintained trust.

**Spoiler-alert** (if you haven't seen this movie): we never find out. The tension is never resolved. There are more questions than answers.

The passage never says “why” God does this. We never find out. There have been entire forests of trees logged and milled for the paper in order to attempt to offer our human interpretations and explanations, but God never explains himself.

**Worship typically vacillates between confident-acceptance and gratitude, and raw, unedited accusation and agitation.**

**Being disillusioned with life and with God is a valuable component in the journey of faith.**

There are some things you think you know (assumed) about God that you would be better off forgetting. Dissolution actually means, “*to free from illusion*”. It means that our journey toward God or our departure from him begins with our thoughts about him.

**Job is not a book about senseless suffering, but about irrational faith; relentless, courageous, risky trust in the midst of everything that seems chaotic and disorderly.**

**Your response:**

**Pause:** reflect on all that you currently ‘do not’ know. Allow those limitations to create space for surrender.

*“Now we see things imperfectly, as in a cloudy mirror, but then...”* (1 Corinthians 13:12)

**Mourn:** grieve all of the seeming inequities and dysfunctionality. Mourning is not something that automatically happens to you (unlike sadness). You have to allow yourself to experience it.

(2/3) of the Psalms are “laments”: mourning aloud. They are unique expressions of worship that we offer specifically from “within” our pain.

Mourning seems to be the necessary step to experience whatever is “next”. It’s a ‘conclusion’, of sorts, that frees your soul to experience hope.

**Listen:** not for comprehension, but for consolation; not for explanations, but for comfort; not for what you don’t know, but because you “can’t” know.

*“I will never abandon you...”* Hebrews 13:5

*“... nothing can ever get between you and my love for you...”* (Romans 8:38-39)

**Receive:** anticipate experiencing a grace previously unknown to you. Welcome new revelation of God made possible only through your circumstance.

**Protest-** engage God in real, mature conversation. Find ways to honestly engage God in conversation which allow you to express your commitment to justice (rightness) without becoming arrogant and resentful.

I think God loves it when we, as his children, begin to ‘find our voice’. When we are asking deeper questions and forming more thoughtful convictions which cannot be satisfied with, “*Because daddy said so*”.

**Wait well:** patience is not about waiting, it’s about “how” we wait. Understand that, often, it’s “too early to tell”. Our judgments and assumptions are pre-mature.

**We want to know and judge. God tells us to trust and love.**

We are a people who don’t do well with ambiguity. We want answers. We live and function in a “solutions-oriented” culture. It’s often difficult for us to come to terms with our finitude and the ignorance that is associated with it, which keeps us living in the illusion of autonomy and independence.

That is why our lives will always involve very little clarity and a great deal of humility. We are called upon to “love” God and ourselves and our near ones, even in the context of all that is “*partial and incomplete*” (1 Corinthians 13).