

The Summer Soul, Job, Part

Text: Job 42

9-3-17



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

"The book of Job is about _____." [fill in that theological blank]

"How have you understood some of the worldview postures on the existence of evil and the reality of a good God? Do you find those (2) proposals to be in conflict? What do you hear in this quote by Epicurus (Greek philosopher)?"

Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able?

Then he is not omnipotent.

Is he able, but not willing?

Then he is malevolent.

Is he both able and willing?

Then whence cometh evil?

Is he neither able nor willing?

Then why call him God?

"If God _____." How have you heard that inquiry completed?"

"Which of Job's friends counsel have you heard most often? Have any of them satisfied you?"

Fundamentalism. Intellectualism. Moralism.

"Are you convinced that what God really wants is simply a better-behaved version of you--- one that learns to please him? Or, do you think he might actually desire to re-shape your heart (passions) in ways that better reflect who he has created you to be--- one that more naturally takes pleasure in him?"

"What is it about you that is presently true that is directly attributable to some former adversity or suffering?"

"How have you been able to experience your present blessings in light of your previous pain?"

Teaching Notes...

Job is an epic depiction of the human experience. It's not a doctrinal treatise. It's not a propositional presentation, followed by a series of "therefores", and, "in light of's". It's not a series of God-facts offered to us in some systematic fashion.

This is a story that seeks resolution, that seems to invite explanation, but which, at every turn, seems to resist it. It is, at once, "beautiful and distorted", "joyful and excruciating", "orderly and evil", "knowledge and mystery".

For some of you, this is a more "philosophical" subject. Suffering makes for good debate-fodder, but it's not where you live, right now. You are in a really good place. Your portfolio is robust, your kids are on the honor roll, your cat had puppies. Don't forget. Don't settle.

For others, you're drowning in medical expenses, planning memorial services, wondering how you were lucky enough to get in on the "500-year flood" (Harvey)... and, oh yeah, you're scraping boils.

No matter how you currently locate yourself, despite your commitment to Paleo and "juicing" and CrossFit, and your *Flintstones* chewable multi-vitamins, your physical body will eventually fail you in ways that reflects something of a world where things fade, and rust, and decay and die.

Despite the extent of your graduate work, your understanding of the 'genome' theory, your capacity for resolving complex, equations, and your precautionary avoidance of the side-walk cracks, there will be those circumstances for which you will have no viable explanation. You won't remain unscathed.

We find ourselves living on the same street as "goodness" and "evil". We're conflicted.

The debate involves, "**theodicy**": a branch of philosophy that attempts to deal with the co-existence of a good God and pervasive evil. It typically starts with, "**If God...**"

Job's (3) friends "break the silence" and weigh in.

Eliphaz [fundamentalist]

First, he utilizes the classic, Christian trump-card: "*God told me*". His theology goes something like this: **God is just... everyone gets what they deserve... Job is suffering... Job has sinned.**

Tidy. Linear. Hospital-corners, theology. And, since you won't admit it, you're also a liar! Nice.

"Stop and think! Do the innocent die? When have the upright been destroyed?" (4:7-9)

He even goes on to say, "*Consider the joy of those corrected by God! Don't despise the discipline of the Almighty when you sin. Though he wounds he bandages...*" (5:17-18) You're blessed, man. God's doing this because he loves you!

Bildad [intellectual]

"God is more glorious than the moon; he shines brighter than the stars. In comparison, people are maggots; we mortals are mere worms" (25:5-6). This guy has serious identity issues.

He has a head full of God-facts, but he can't, honestly, feel a thing: not his own inner-tension and certainly not your pain. Bildad confuses holiness with indifference. He believes that God's glory eradicates human significance.

“Everything happens for a reason”. God has a plan”.

“Are you really confident enough in your relationship with God that you could say, ‘God has some bigger reason for wiping out my family and for gracing me with a condition which requires life-long pain management?’”

This kind of theology is front-loaded with hope. It says that the reasons may not be apparent now, but clarity will come, and when it does, I will be able to rest in knowing why God did this to me. But, if followed to its logical conclusion, this is ‘disturbing’. This is not a hopeful image of God. *God allowed your father to physically abuse and sexually assault you when you were a child, but all for a greater purpose... and all for his glory!?* God ‘gifted you’ with some debilitating disorder in order that you might learn to trust him? I’m assuming that this is the kind of attention/press that God would not necessarily invite.

Zophar [moralist]

Moralists are “sinners with better manners.” It provides the perfect cover for hypocrisy. *“If only you would lift up your hands in prayer. Get rid of your sins. You will be protected and rest in safety...”* (11).

Increase your good-deed quotient and suffering solved! Zophar is so busy defending God’s righteousness that he can’t hear Job. It doesn’t see the ‘blind person’, but the failure of his parents. It doesn’t notice the woman who is face down in the dirt, the victim of ‘adultery gate’, just the (10) Commandments used to stone her.

Job’s friends were informed and formed in a system of “justice” which was fairly straightforward and airtight: **“retribution”**. Cause and effect. You get what you deserve. What goes around, comes around. Takes one to know one! (?) If you violate the rules, there will be consequences, but God also keeps a pocket full of ‘*human treats*’ for positive reinforcement.

In order to assist Job, they start developing this laundry-list of sins that Job must have committed: stealing blankets from the homeless, takes widow’s Social Security checks out of their mailboxes, drinks bottled water.

Be cautioned of the theology that you develop, solely in suffering. Be equally cautioned of the theology that you develop in times of relative ease and comfort. Neither is sufficient. Both are incomplete.

We often theologize out of our own fears. You know what we really want? We don’t want to believe that this kind of stuff can’t happen to us!

If your settled-ness is dependent upon certainty, unencumbered by doubt, and always manageable... it’s not faith! It can only produce the next strategy, but never hope.

The question of God’s goodness may be best addressed in sovereignty and sovereignty is essentially about “trust” not “explanations”.

To say, “God is good”, is really a faith-filled declaration about his nature and not an evaluation of our present experience. To proclaim the goodness of God, in the context of your really raunchy life-circumstance, means that you are either delusional or hopeful.

Not everything that happens is God's will. God does not always get what God wants... at least, not now.

"Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth..." (Matthew 6)

Biblical wisdom says:

There is **"order"**: the way that God intended/designed for things to be; the architectural design of "wisdom".

There is **"disorder"**: *"not the way things ought to be"*; evil. The result of our willingness to call into question God's goodness and his good intentions for us. Sin.

We live, frequently, under the implications of a world where God's will and desires are ignored or dismissed, altogether. In the earth today, there are other "wills" being followed or imposed.

Because there are some things we cannot know, does not eliminate the possibility of knowing some things. Many things.

"The LORD our God has secrets known to no one. We are not accountable for them, but we are accountable forever for all that he has revealed to us..." [Deuteronomy 29:29]

Though his *"ways are beyond tracing out"* (Romans 11:33), his desires are fairly evident (*"... that it may go well with you..."* Ephesians 6:3) [Deuteronomy 5:16; Deuteronomy 5:33; Psalm 128:2; Jeremiah 35:7]

The point is "not" to abandon your pursuit of knowledge and understanding of God. It is to receive and rehearse all that he reveals to be true of himself so that we are not formulating our theology based on "circumstantial evidence".

"And the moral of the story is..."

We arrive at this point and we are ready for the tidy, *"Chicken-Soup-for-the-Soul"*, summation. We are anxious for God to "whiteboard" this all out for us so that we can follow the linear pattern of thought and reasoning.

Job finds out he's being *"Punked"*. God comes out, reveals the cameras, says, *"Hey Job, thanks for playing our home version of, 'Name That Senseless Suffering'. As a consolation prize, I'm gonna make it worth your effort."*

In the story, Job's current prosperity has no direct correlation with his righteousness, just as his suffering could not be directly traced back to his sin.

Most often, instead of answering questions, God asks them.

God's point in providing Job with this "virtual tour" of creation is not to overwhelm him with his sovereignty or bury him in his own ignorance, but to portray, for Job, that the world is so complex that it cannot function under simply cause-effect, principle. There are too many variables.

Perhaps God wanted Job, not to come to terms with his own frailty, but with the magnificence of his God (e.g. taking Job to the scene of a deer giving birth (39): *"What does this have to do with anything, God?!"*)

Perhaps it was to center his heart in the eternal purposes of a God who is both, "powerful" and "good"; never leveraging/exploiting our weakness as an opportunity to prove himself right (40:8).

Adversity is always a “catalyst” for something in our lives.

It provokes change. It will violently oppose our commitment to the ‘status-quo’. Sometimes it’s bitterness and despair. Sometimes its angst and depression. Sometimes it’s a calm delight (joy) and a quieted heart.

Suffering well makes us memorable.

Think of the people that you have admired and that have been the most influential in your life. I would dare say that, for a great majority of them, you would recollect that they “suffered well”.

The graces you experience on the other side of your adversity are not meant to “replace” what was lost. It’s like telling a mom who has just miscarried a child that she’s still young and can have other kids.

I’m assuming that if we haven’t suffered well--- haven’t named the loss, identified our feelings, struggled to understand, voiced our protest--- even future blessings (future graces) cannot be received and realized sufficiently. We will resent God and interpret the blessings as his subtle form of apology.

God is “not” to be known in cold, calculated doctrinal propositions, but in the seeming paradoxes of life. Your systematic theology books are where you “hear about God”. Life is where you gain the capacity to “see him with your eyes”. One is informative. The other, transformative.

“What if to relentlessly ask the question is to miss the answer?”

“Trust in the Lord, with all of your heart, and don’t depend on your own understanding...” Proverbs 3:5-6

You were created for reason and meaning and curiosity and inquiry, but, you were also created for dependence and trust.

The answers you seek, the clarity you desire, can only satisfy you within the context of dependence and trust. In trust, our tone is less accusatory and demanding and more ‘appeal-ing’.

God is able to reveal some things which will invite you to trust his character, but never in a way that he is obligated to defend or explain himself. He will provide story after story of the ways that he reveals himself as a God who is “just” (determined to set things right), but never in ways that answer all of your questions.

Psalm 91:14

“Because he loves me,” says the LORD, “I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.”

Jeremiah 17

“But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him.”