

Read also Romans 8:17-23

You are not going to like this story. You even may not like this sermon. As I wrote it I kept saying to God, I don't understand this. How do such things happen? Can you explain it please?

I have never begun a sermon with a disclaimer. But it seems reasonable here because this story speaks of a series of disasters happening to someone for no reason. In one day Job's life changed forever. I want to prepare you because it is hard to accept.

Yet even though we do not like everything in the Bible, I hope as we consider Job's story it opens the door to deeper thinking about suffering and how God brought Job—and brings us—through it.

Every day people's lives are changed by tragedy. Loss, accidents, illness, and death are sad realities of this world—so should the Bible not tell us of those realities? That makes the Bible relevant and helpful, even though we may not like it.

Okay, let's hear it. The story begins with a cosmic battle. Satan presented himself to the Lord stating his premise. He believed humans love God only because God blesses them. And if the blessings are removed and people experience bad things, humans will lose their faith and curse God.

God disagreed.

Perhaps God had great faith in his servant Job. God called Job a "blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil." (Job 1:9)

Satan said, "That's just because he has no troubles. You have given him a life of ease. Strike him with disease and take away his ease and he will curse you to your face." (vs. 10-11)

Job could probably relate to this Far Side cartoon in which two deer were standing in the forest and one had a big red bull's eye on his chest. The other says, "Bummer of a birthmark, Hal."¹



¹Gary Larson, "The Far Side" comic strip, accessed 11/6/2018. See <https://www.google.com/search?q=Far+Side+cartoon,+Bummer+of+a+bull's+eye+Hal>

When God gave Job's possessions into Satan's power, it was like God had put a target on him. But God did not allow Satan power over Job's life. (v. 12) READ Job 1:13-22

This became the day that never ended. This was the day that the messenger was despised. This was the day that beat Job down with a hammer and life would never be the same again. At the end of the day after the fourth messenger left his presence, "Job stood up and tore his robe in grief. Then he shaved his head and fell to the ground to worship. He said,

"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."

In all of this, Job did not sin by blaming God" (v. 20-22).

God was right. Job was a blameless and upright man who feared God and turned away from evil.

Perhaps in your suffering you have done the same. Perhaps you have not. Let's just consider aspiring to such great character.

But Satan wouldn't give up. He persisted against Job. Do you ever feel like Satan persists against you? Peter did. He writes,

"Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

Job did exactly that. Job found himself in a powerless place but he shored himself against the attack and made a powerful choice. He did not curse God. When Satan came before God again, God pointed that out:

"There's no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason" (Job 2:3).

And then things got worse. Satan, the ever-stubborn tempter intensified the battle, "Skin for skin! . . . Stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." (v. 4-5)

The Lord allowed Satan to take away Job's health. (v. 6)

It is important that we resist the temptation to stop listening and commentate on this—whether God should have done this or not; or whether God is unfair or not; or that God

should not have allowed this. Instead, let's recognize that Satan is always setting up temptations.

Satan is The Tempter. That is Satan's war strategy against us.

"Resist him," Peter says. "Remain steadfast in your faith, for all over the world believers are undergoing this kind of suffering" (1 Peter 5:9).

So Job lost his health. He got a chronic illness that went on and on. Job's wife gave up her faith. But Job did not sin. (2:9-10)

Why does the Bible tell this terrible story? God wants to teach us what to do when faced with suffering.

Many people have dealt with experiences like Job: debilitating illness; financial loss; abandonment; abusive relationships; halted careers (even missionaries); children who have struggled; spouses who have died; loss of family members, even more than one in a short period of time.

At times it seems like a world full of "no" and negatives and setbacks and hurt.

These are places of powerlessness. But with God, you and I have the opportunity to make a powerful choice to worship him even in times of great struggle.

Job's friends came to be with him and they tried to figure out WHY. Why did this happen? Was it Job's fault? What about God's justice? What does God owe us? Is God sovereign?

Finally Job said to his friends, "You are miserable comforters! You are not helping at all. Go away." (Job 16, 19)

A few chapters (38-40) later God showed up. God spoke to Job like a man and it is beautiful. When you are discouraged, you should read it and see God's power.

- *When Satan tempted Eve, God showed up and picked up the pieces.*
- *When Cain struggled with anger, God showed up with encouragement and advice.*
- *When evil was rampant on earth, God showed up for Noah to save his family*
- *When Israel was oppressed in Egypt, God showed up and rescued them.*
- *When Jezebel went after Elijah to kill him, God showed up on the mountain.*
- *Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, God's word kept him safe.*
- *At the cross of Jesus, God showed up and resurrected him, defeating Satan forever.*

With God, the world, even with its sufferings, becomes a "yes." Satan cannot prevent God from showing up or redeeming.

In your powerless place, what choice do you want to make?

Paul writes, "For we know that all creation has been groaning [over death and decay] as in the pains of childbirth, [waiting] . . . And we believers also groan . . . for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. (Romans 8:21-23) Thus pain is a powerless place.

But we "wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us." (23b)

Job's testimony is that worshipping God in suffering becomes a powerful place because God shows up and restores everything.

C. S. Lewis wrote: "In medieval times when there was suffering, the question was asked this way: "How is **the soul conformed to reality**" (the realities of death and decay)? The old wise, medieval solution was this: through knowledge, self-discipline, and virtue our soul survives.

But in modern times the question has become, "How do we **subdue the reality of life to [our] wishes**?" The modern solution is not concerned with morality or piety toward God.² It is concerned with our desires.

The powerful place is to be concerned more with the soul than life without pain.

So when you experience suffering, remember, God is not afraid of pain. God is fully capable of bring you through. Although you are powerless to change it, you can make a powerful choice to worship a God who can change everything.

In a world full of no, we have a God full of yes.³ Let us worship him.

AMEN

² C. S. Lewis, from *The Abolition of Man* in *A Year with C. S. Lewis*, (New York: HarperCollins), 339.

³ Inspired by Southwest Airlines' ad, "In a world full of no we are a plane full of yes."