

JOB 42:1-6
WHAT ABOUT US?

Last week, we spent the first of two weeks in the book of Job, by asking a hard question about God. In a world of evil and suffering, can we trust God to be both great and good? In Job, God reveals that he is both.

The book of Job is about God, but the book of Job is also about us. How are we to respond, when we face evil and suffering?

A full answer would take months! But as we read Job's final words in the book, we gain wisdom about how we live, in a world of real evil and suffering.

Suffering brings challenge, but suffering also brings opportunity.

Reflecting on the sufferings of St. Patrick, Christian author George Grant wrote, "We know that often it is in 'afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labors, sleeplessness, and hunger' that our real mettle is proven. Nevertheless, we often forget that these things are not simply to be endured. They actually frame our greatest calling."

Suffering brings challenge, but suffering also brings opportunity. You know the first part, but do you know the second part? How would your response to suffering change, if you saw the opportunity in suffering?

This morning, I want to offer you three questions to ask, when you see and experience suffering. Each question presents us with a challenge. Yet each question also presents us with an opportunity, for in suffering, we are indeed drawn toward our highest calling.

Here is the first question we must ask as we see and experience evil and suffering: **WHY DO I LOVE GOD?**

It is **A CHALLENGE**, because it is the core of Satan's challenge to God in the beginning of the book.

Satan declares in chapter 1, "Does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face."

Then Satan proclaims in chapter 2, "A man will give all he has for his own life. But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face."

Do you hear the challenge? Satan is saying to God, does Job love you because of what you do for him? Or does he love you because of who you are? If you take away all these blessings he enjoys, will he still love you?

What about you? What about me? We may claim to "love" God. But what is that love really all about?

Think of it this way: what blessing or blessings might you lose, that would lead you not to love God, but to hate God?

Your home? Your income? Your spouse? Certain possessions? A certain friend? A particular position or image in the community? Your health?

The longer that list, the more you must admit that you do not love God so much for who he is, but more for what he gives.

Or think of it this way: when you praise God, for what are you praising him? Do you praise him for who he is, or just for what he has given to you? Yes, it is good to thank him for his gifts. But is that it? Does your heart respond only to the gifts, or does your heart respond to the Giver?

Why do I love God? It is a challenge, but it is also **AN OPPORTUNITY**.

Listen now to some of Job's words:

* In chapter 1, right after the reports of the first series of disasters: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised."

* In chapter 2, right after his wife has urged him to curse God and die: "Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?"

* Then in chapter 42, after God has spoken: "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you."

What has happened? Job has experienced the goodness and greatness of God in a new and profound way. He understands that God is worthy of praise, even when he does not bless us in all the ways we want to be blessed.

Pastor Bryan Chapell tells the story of a man named Eric, surrounded by machines, lying in a hospital room while a brain tumor destroyed his body.

As Bryan entered the room, Eric was dizzy with pain. He grimaced as he smiled. He had only a few words to say.

"Bryan, please help my family not to hurt too much. I feel sorry for all of you. I will see Jesus soon, but you have to wait.

"I just pray that I can glorify the Lord through this."

Do you see the opportunity? Why did Eric love the Lord in that moment? Because he was worthy of

glory, even though he had ordained that Eric's life here would be slowly taken away.

When we suffer, God strips away what we assume we must have, and he leaves us only with himself - the One we absolutely must have.

How are you seeing and experiencing a world of evil and suffering today? How is someone in your life, experiencing this?

Maybe you are facing the loss of a friend, who now treats you like dirt, and taunts you with harsh words. You have an opportunity - to love God as the One who is perfectly loving, even when people are not.

Maybe you are facing the prospect of losing your job, because of foolish decisions by other people. You have an opportunity - to love God as the One who is perfectly faithful to provide, even when you don't see how.

Maybe you are facing a physical ailment that robs you of your strength, your independence, and your hope. You have an opportunity - to love God as the One who will be with you, whatever comes next.

Why do I love God? What is he taking away, that you might love him, first and best?

Then a second question, with a challenge and an opportunity. **WHAT DO I TRULY KNOW?**

This is A CHALLENGE, as you think about Job's friends.

They come, they sit, and they mourn. But then they speak, and a lively argument breaks out!

In the words of Job, why are they such "miserable comforters"?

* Their hearts seem to be right. We read in chapter 3 that they set out from their homes to sympathize with Job, and to comfort him.

* Their theology seems to be good. For example, in chapter 4, Eliphaz says, "Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can a man be more pure than God?" The answer is no, and his answer is right!

* But here is their problem: they presume to know something they do not know. They are sure Job is suffering, because God is punishing him.

For example, Eliphaz declares, "Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed? As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it. At the breath of God they are destroyed; at the blast of his anger they perish."

What is happening? They think they have it all figured out. It's "one-size-fits-all." People sin, so they suffer.

But God's revelation is more complex than that. Think of two examples:

* Joseph. He was a bit too proud about his neat multicolored coat, but he was not thrown in a ditch by his brothers and sold as a slave to Egypt because he sinned.

* David. He committed adultery and murder, and the result was that his infant son died.

So which is it with Job? Is he like Joseph, suffering innocently? Or is he like David, suffering because of his sin?

We know, because we know the story. Job is more like Joseph. But Job's friends don't know, yet they assume they know! Their words harm, not help.

Do you see this in yourself, or in others? We speak about suffering, and we speak with such ignorance.

"9/11 was because of..." "Hurricane Katrina was because of..." "Those shootings at Virginia Tech were because of..."

"You have that disease because..." "Your house burned down because..." "Your teacher gave you that bad grade because..."

What do I truly know? The book of Job challenges us to a real humility, as we see and experience a world of evil and suffering. God does not reveal reasons for every event. We must know that there is much we do not know.

Yet there is also AN OPPORTUNITY in this question.

Job says in chapter 42, "Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know."

Job is speaking like the writer of Psalm 131: "My heart is not proud, O Lord, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me. But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me."

A hundred years ago, Benjamin Warfield was a scholar at Princeton Seminary. He was also a husband.

He and his wife Annie were married in 1876. On their honeymoon, Annie was struck by lightning and paralyzed.

Benjamin Warfield was left to care for her, for the rest of her life. It was said that he seldom left her side for more than two hours at a time, for 39 years, until she died in 1915.

Why must this be? Surely Benjamin Warfield wondered why. Surely Benjamin Warfield wanted to know!

But here is what he wrote to fellow Christians: "All that comes to you is under His controlling hand...If He governs all, then nothing but good can befall those to whom He would do good..."

"Though we are too weak to help ourselves and too blind to ask for what we need, and can only groan in

unformed longings...He will so govern all things that we shall reap only good from all that befalls us.”

The disability of his wife was an opportunity for Benjamin Warfield to admit that he did not know everything, but he could rest, trust, and still faithfully serve the Lord.

Maybe this entire second question is offensive to some of you! We live in a culture where we are conditioned to learn everything we want to know. We resent God for keeping us in the dark.

But God has not designed for us to know everything. He has designed for him to be God, and for us to be limited in what we know. With that challenge, we have an opportunity for a profound step forward in faith. We have to give up our desire to know everything, and let God shape our hearts so that we will rest in peace, because we trust him who is both good and great.

I do not know why the doctor said “cancer” to my friend. But with God’s help, I will still and quiet my soul.

I do not know why drugs have gripped that young man’s heart, and I do not know if it will ever change. But with God’s help, I will be concerned with the matter of how to help, not the matter of figuring out why.

I do not know why God allows terrorists to terrify me and others. But with God’s help, I will not be proud to think I know the answers.

I do not know, and you do not know. Only God knows, and our lack of knowledge is an opportunity to trust him more.

Why do I love God? What do I truly know? Then a challenge, and an opportunity, is in this question: **HOW WILL THIS LEAD ME TO JESUS?**

It is A CHALLENGE, when we read Job’s final words. He says, “Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.”

When we see and experience evil and suffering, we are called to search our hearts and lives, before the holy God of all. As this search reveals sin within our hearts and lives, we must turn from it.

Why? Because God is getting us? No, we do not know that.

We do this search because evil and suffering remind us that we are part of a broken world, and we are broken, too. All of our blessings come because of God’s mercy, not our merits. So our challenge with evil and suffering is to say, “What about me? As I see this evil, what evil remains in my heart and my life?”

Charles Spurgeon once wrote,

“Jesus uses the whole range of experience to wean us from earth and woo us to heaven. Christ is exalted to the throne of heaven and earth in order that, by all the processes of His providence, He may subdue hard hearts to the gracious softening of repentance.”

The gracious softening of repentance. It doesn’t feel that way, does it? “Here is what a sinner you are!”

But it is gracious. God humbles us without humiliating us. He calls us to honestly look at our hearts and our lives, while we walk through this world of evil and suffering, and to turn away from whatever dishonors him.

Yet in that challenge, there is indeed AN OPPORTUNITY.

Two weeks after the Virginia Tech shootings, Christian writer Philip Yancey spoke on that campus. He said, “The Jews...had a saying: ‘Where Messiah is, there is no misery.’”

“After Jesus, you could change that saying to, ‘Where misery is, there is the Messiah.’”

Job hoped in a Redeemer. The Redeemer he hoped for, challenged people to repent of their sins, so they might have the opportunity to believe in him.

Jesus has entered this world of misery, and he has taken our evil upon himself on the cross, and now he ministers to the miserable.

But his ministry is not just to “make it all better.” His ministry is to “make them all better.” Suffering is an opportunity for us to be drawn to Jesus. Through suffering, we can follow, trust, and love Jesus more.

Peter wrote to suffering Christians, “These (trials) have come so that your faith - of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire - may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

When we see and experience a world of evil and suffering, we must ask, “How is God using this to draw me closer to Jesus Christ?”

Do I need to know him? Maybe you do not. Maybe God is working in your life today, so that you might know Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Do I need to grow in him? Maybe you are not. Maybe you are stagnant. Maybe you are comfortable. Maybe you are enjoying the gifts too much, and loving the Giver, too little. Maybe evil and suffering will be God’s tool to grow you more into the likeness of Jesus.

Do I need to show him? Maybe you are not. Maybe you are just like everyone else, and God needs to do something in you, to produce something unique in you, that you may show Jesus to the people in your life.

I do not want to romanticize this. Evil and suffering are real, and they are awful. God may seem cruel to you, when I tell you that he will use evil and suffering to lead you to Jesus.

It seems cruel, but it is not. It is his loving tool for his great plan - to reunite people to himself, and to draw

them into following Jesus forever.

You may know the story of Joni Eareckson Tada. She was paralyzed in her youth, after a terrible accident. Yet God has used her to encourage so many who suffer.

Not long ago, she wrote these words. These are actually words spoken to her by her pastor:

“God permits what He hates to accomplish what he loves.”

God hates evil and suffering. He is good, and he hates it. He is great, and one day he will banish it.

But he will use it to accomplish what he loves, and what he loves is when people turn in Jesus to faith, and live their lives for him.

So as you enter this world of evil and suffering, post these questions in your heart - maybe for your benefit, or for the benefit of someone in your life, who needs them.

Why do I love God? What do I truly know? How will this lead me to Jesus?

Suffering brings challenge, but suffering also brings opportunity.

In Jesus, we know he is accomplishing in us, what he loves.