

"Job's Suffering"
Job 1:1 – 3:26
Ellen Wong

Water is an interesting and powerful element. It can provide many benefits such as generating electricity, preventing the spread of germs through hand washing, and cooling the body down with a nice swim on a hot summer day. But it can also have negative effects. Soaking in water too long can cause skin to become "pruney" or wrinkly. Hurricanes can destroy lives and properties; and water can even affect our health – too little intake causes dehydration, too much can cause hyponatremia, water intoxication. It's just like killing a plant by over watering.

In Southern California it doesn't rain much. When it sprinkles, we don't go out. But for the rest of the world, it doesn't even faze them. When it rains, an umbrella may come out and people may start walking a little faster. But when it pours, people run for cover.

You've heard the expression, "when it rains, it pours." That's when you're experiencing a collage of negative events in a short period of time. Often those circumstances spark a change in behavior.

We can all agree that suffering can produce positive outcomes. "...lives are often transformed, deepened, marked with beauty and holiness, in remarkable ways that could never have been anticipated before the suffering." (Eugene Peterson)

But other times, people can fall into depression and never get out of it, resorting to bad and dangerous behaviors. During trials and tribulations, sometimes there are no explanations, at least not one that can be seen. Nobody knows this better than our friend Job.

Carol mentioned in her opening lecture that the Book of Job is often considered to be the oldest book in the Bible. It is one of poetical books and, therefore, sometimes difficult to read and interpret, which doesn't make it a popular book to study. However, we're going to find that it is one of the most interesting and mysterious books that pose a few unanswered questions, such as Who? When? Where? And Why?

As to Who, suggested authors of this book ranged from Job himself, Moses, Isaiah, Elihu (the 4th friend), Hezekiah, Ezra, and an anonymous author 200 years before Christ. Others argue for Solomon because of his interest in poetic literature and a few similarities between Job and Proverbs (e.g., Job 28 and Proverbs 8).

As far as When these events occurred, the book itself gives us some hints. Job's long life (possibly 200 years or more), his accumulation of livestock as a sign of wealth, his role as family priest, and his use of the patriarchal name for God (Shaddai) all

suggest that Job lived during the patriarchal age. (Charles R. Swindoll) There is no reference to Mosaic institutions (priesthood, laws, tabernacle, special religious days and feasts). (John Walvoord/Roy Zuck)

Where did Job live? Job is pictured in "the land of Uz." (Not to be confused with the magical land of Oz ruled by the Wizard.) Since the reference is to "the land of Uz," and not the city of Uz, it relates to a region rather than a town or village. The size and location of the area are unknown just like in the Wizard of Oz. Although, the reference "...He was the greatest man among all the people of the East" (1:2), we could assume this region was in the east, northeast of Palestine, near desert land (1:19), probably between the city of Damascus and the Euphrates River. This would place the region near the borders of modern Iraq and Saudi Arabia. (Irving Jensen)

The Why is the big question. There are no clear solutions or reasons for Job's sufferings other than it was God's will to show Himself through Job's faith.

BACKGROUND:

Job was more than a good man. He was "blameless", without moral blemish; "upright", "straight" in the sense of not deviating from God's standards; "feared God", aware of, revering, and submissive to God's majesty; "shunned evil", hating and rejecting the opposite of God's character. That assessment, repeated by God (1:8; 2:3), tells us that Job was no ordinary man. (Roy Zuck)

Job was a wealthy landowner not with lions and tigers and bears, oh my (that's from the Wizard of Oz), but with 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 1,000 oxen, 500 donkeys (and a partridge in a pear tree), and many servants. His sheep provided clothing and food; camels and donkeys provided transportation; and the oxen provided food and milk. As you can see, Job was very wealthy.

He wasn't just blessed with a full quiver of children, 7 sons and 3 daughters, but the joy and delight in the company of one another. "His sons used to hold feasts in their homes on their birthdays, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them." (1:4) If you remember my last lecture about the family relationship scale of 1 to 10, I'd rank them a 10. That is the best rating because it's the ultimate blessing for parents.

After the period of feasting, Job, as the head of the family, would sacrifice a burnt offering for each one of his children, anticipating they may "have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." (1:5) This reflects the love, dedication, and sacrifice of a parent to go to this extent for all ten children after each celebration. That would be 70 burnt offerings a year for the 7 sons' birthdays.

FIRST SCENE IN HEAVEN – GOD AND SATAN:

Let's look at the word Satan. Personally, I don't like to say or acknowledge that word, and I also don't like the other word either, devil. But avoiding the word doesn't eradicate its existence. Satan means adversary. Adversary means one that contends with, opposes, or resists: an enemy or opponent.

One day when the angels came to report to God, Satan came along with them. (1:6) God singled out Satan asking him, "Where have you come from?" As always, Satan was up to no good roaming around earth looking for a victim.

1 Peter 5:8 says, "Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." He's looking for an opportunity to kill, steal, and destroy [John 10:10]; anyone who has given into their temptations, or may be holding a grudge, refusing to forgive, or nursing and feeding anger, Satan is looking for you.

You would think Satan would be the one challenging God, but it was quite the opposite. God offered Job to look at because "he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." (1:8) Satan claimed Job was good because God has blessed him and "put a hedge of protection around him and his household and everything he has." (1:10) Take away his family and fortune, he is sure to curse God. "Very well (God said), then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself, do not lay a finger." (1:12)

This permission by God can be reassuring and frightening at the same time. Reassuring that nothing can happen without God's approval; frightening in the sense of what He's willing to allow. Although Paul does remind us in 1 Corinthians, "God will not test you above what you are able to bear." Someone said this to me when I was a nonbeliever. I remember thinking, I must not be able to handle much since I hadn't experienced any deaths or adversity...at the time. Satan's going to have a field day. I could hear him say, "Let the devastation begin. When it rains, it's going to pour."

Picture the storm that came upon Job in endless waves. First, the news that the Sabeans had stolen the oxen and donkeys and killed the field servants; then he learned that bolts of lightning had struck and killed his sheep and shepherds. Another messenger arrived and reported that bands of Chaldeans (who are Aramean nomadic plunderers—who roam aimlessly to steal) had raided the camel flock and slain all the attendants except for himself. Then the gravest news of all. His children had all been killed when a mighty wind collapsed the house where they had been celebrating. This was the news that broke the camel's back (not literally).

"...Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: "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." (1:20-21)

I don't know about you, but praise wouldn't be the first words coming out of my mouth. What he was really saying was, "Thank God for the times when I did have these things, and the enjoyment they gave me; the times with my children and the blessings they brought into my life. Rather than complain about their loss, I recognize God's sovereign right to do with me as He will. If He gives me things, He has the right to take them away. All I can do is say 'Thank you' for having had them as long as I did." (Ray Stedman) So, "In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong." (1:22) This certainly illustrated Job's character and faithfulness to God.

PERSPECTIVE:

Having God in our lives doesn't negate the severity of any situation, but it can lessen the sting of adversity. Focusing on God changes the perspective of how we see things, and how it affects us.

There was a great video of a young boy on a baseball field standing alone at home plate. He had a baseball bat in one hand and a ball in the other. As he threw the ball straight up in the air, he swung the bat as gravity pulled the ball back down yelling, "I'm the greatest baseball player in the world" and missed the ball. As he gasped for air and sighed with disbelief, he picked the ball up, threw it in the air, swung the bat again and yelled, "I'm the greatest baseball player in the world" and missed. Determined to hit this ball, he once again threw the ball, swung the bat, and yelled, "I'm the greatest baseball player in the world" and this time, he didn't even come close. He stood there looking puzzled, and then looked up with a grin on his face and said, "I'm the greatest pitcher in the world." Changing our perspective on how we see things can make a world of difference. The painfulness of trials and tribulation are determined by the perspective we choose to see.

I know a thing or two about pouring rain, and I'm sure you all have a story of your own. During my last lecture I mentioned something about moving out of the house at the age of 18. This is how I ended up in Southern California and met my future husband. We got married and he wanted to have children right away, four to be exact, because he wanted the family he never had.

I'm a planner and had certain requirements before bringing children into our marriage. Number one, I wanted to finish college and get my degree. Two, purchase a 4-door family vehicle. And three, buy a house. When all that was accomplished, I still was not ready. My poor husband was getting very impatient and gave me a guilt trip. "By the time we have children, they'll have to push me to their graduation in a wheelchair." After 8 years of marriage, I eventually gave in. When we had our first child, my husband was elated. He was so protective, it was pathetic. After a year, I found myself pregnant again. I didn't plan this one so how I got pregnant, I'm not so sure. I mean, I know how I got pregnant. It's...How did I allow this to happen?

Men are wrong many times even when they are right, they are wrong, right? (Some of men are nodding. Those are smart men.) Well, my husband was wrong. He wasn't pushed to our children's graduation in a wheelchair. (pause) He never made it. He passed suddenly when our oldest child was 18 months old, and I was 6 months pregnant. I now know why I got pregnant when I did.

As a single mother, I was bothered by the absence of a father figure for my boys. Wanting to ensure proper mourning, I knew to avoid any new relationships. Although I'm not so sure how effective that mourning period was with 2 young kids, working full-time, and keeping up with other responsibilities like the house, bills, etc. To make a long story short, I eventually remarried, had 2 more children, and then ended up divorced. Leaving that marriage was one of the hardest, if not the hardest decision I ever had to make.

I may not have experienced the same level of suffering as Job or you have, but we all have suffered greatly to some extent. Job's angelic worship at the stage of extreme loss and intense grief verified God's words about Job's godly character.

SECOND SCENE IN HEAVEN – GOD AND SATAN:

On another day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them. And the Lord said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" (2:1-2) Doing as he frequently does, he replied, "...roaming the earth, going back and forth on it." (v. 2)

Once again, God offered Job as an example because "he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil and he still maintains his integrity, though you incited Me against him to ruin him without any reason." (2:3) "Skin for skin!" Satan replied. "A man will give all he has for his own life." Satan continue to say, "But stretch out Your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse You to Your face." (2:5) In the phrase, "touch his flesh and bones," he was asking for access to the total human—not only the physical body, but his soul and spirit.

Surprisingly, God granted him permission to afflict Job, but his life must be spared. Satan immediately caused Job to have painful sores all over his body. The sores were so severe, he sat among the ashes and scraped them with broken pottery. (2:6-8) Missionaries in primitive culture have reported that pemphigus foliaceus patients (an autoimmune condition that causes painful, itchy blisters and sores on the skin) have soothed their sores with ashes. (Walvoord/Zuck)

Job has been stripped of his wealth, his children, his own health, and now his wife. When he needed her support and comfort the most, she tells him to curse God to end this pain. Have you had people in your life let you down? Be careful not to put humans on a pedestal whether it be your pastor, parents, or partner. We, people are all

flawed. "Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins." [Ecclesiastes 7:20] In doing so, we set ourselves up for disappointment. In all these afflictions, Job did not sin.

JOB'S THREE FRIENDS:

It is a blessing to have friends that will stand by us during tough times. Job had three friends who did just that. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar had traveled many miles to sympathize and comfort Job when they heard of his troubles. Because Job was so disfigured to the point of unrecognition while experiencing extreme pain, his friends raised their voices, mourned, and wept possibly in preparation for his death, in deep grief, or in recognition of their helplessness.

What would you do or say to someone who is suffering? Well, here are 10 things not to say to a grieving person:

Things Not to Say to Someone in Grief:

1. You'll get through it, be strong, or God doesn't give you anything you can't handle.
2. He brought this on himself, it was his fault.
3. She's in a better place.
4. It's been a while; aren't you over him yet? (That's a little harsh.)
5. He lived a long time; at least he didn't die young.
6. God must have wanted her there because she was such a good person.
7. You're young. You can always have another child.
8. I know exactly how you feel. (You don't want to compare your feelings or situation with someone else's.)
9. I guess it was his time to go.
10. Everything happens for a reason; life goes on. (As believers, we know that, but this is not the time to say that.)

So, what could we say instead? Here are some suggestions.

Things to Say to Someone in Grief:

1. I can't imagine what you're going through.
2. I'm so sorry for your loss.
3. I don't know what to say; I wish I had the right words to comfort you.
4. You, your family and loved ones will be in my thoughts and prayers.
5. She was so nice to me; one of my favorite memories of her was... (share a happy memory or a funny one).
6. Whenever you want to talk, just know I am a phone call away.
7. She was so wonderful; she'll be missed by so many people.
8. I'm your friend – I'm here for you.
9. If you can't think of anything to say, a hug or simple touch can be comforting. (I remembered my girlfriend who comes over once a year is not a touchy, feely

person. When I was going through a rough time, she stuck her hand out of her car window before driving off; I grabbed her hand and just lost it. Touch can be very powerful.)

10. Sometimes just be with the person; you don't have to say anything.

(<https://www.boltonhospice.org.uk/news/2020/12/what-to-say-and-what-not-to-say-to-someone-who-grieving>)

This is exactly what the friends did. They sat with Job for 7 days and 7 nights in silence. The reason may have been a show of sympathy and comfort, or they were at a loss for words. It also could have been a way of mourning. At that time, it was customary to allow the grieving person to speak first.

JOB SPEAKS:

In chapter three, Job broke the silence by lamenting, "Why was I ever born?" He pronounced it as a day of darkness.

Job's second question was, "Having been born, why didn't I die at birth?" He would rather been stillborn than live in his present condition.

Since that didn't happen, the third question was, "Why can't I die now?" Job argued, what's the purpose of life if it is filled with misery, suffering, and anguish.

On March 31, 1824, Franz Schubert, a musician, wrote a letter to his friend Leopold Kupelweiser as he was painfully suffering from syphilis:

I feel myself to be the most unhappy and wretched creature in the world. Imagine a man whose health will never be right again, a man whose most brilliant hopes have perished, to whom love and friendship have nothing to offer but pain, whose enthusiasm for all things beautiful is gone, and I ask you, is he not a miserable, unhappy being? Each night, on retiring to bed, I hope I may not wake again, and each morning but recalls yesterday's grief.

He too wanted his life to end.

Satan had used the Hebrew word "hedged in" when accusing God's protection over Job (1:10). Job used the same words in reference to a restrictive hedge that not only hid a way out from him, but also was a limit to his freedom of movement. (3:22) This was the first time Job declared God as the cause of his troubles. Job was "sighing" instead of eating because he lost his appetite, and his groaning cries were continuous like the unending nature of rushing stream of water. (3:24) Job proclaimed there was no purpose to life when it's not enjoyable.

THE THREE FRIENDS:

Back to Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz. She traveled with three friends who had different personalities: the Scarecrow who needed a brain, the Tin Man who's missing a heart, and the Cowardly Lion who wanted courage. Job's three friends were also very different with different personalities. In the coming chapters after Job's lamentation, the friends will give their take as to the cause of Job's suffering but will presents it according to their personalities: Eliphaz was eloquent and gracious; Bildad was brutal and accusatory; and Zophar was sympathetic and compassionate. Regardless, they all alluded to the same conclusion. What someone gets depends on what that person has done. Job was being punished for his sins.

New believers often remember their sins and feel they are punished for them by the circumstances that befall them. Understanding God's grace is a maturing process. Romans 8:1 "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Jesus took all our sins (past, present, and future) on Himself at the cross. The consequences may apply to us, but the penalty of sin does not. "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past". [Isaiah 43:18] I am he who blots out your transgression... and remembers your sins no more. [Isaiah 43:25]

If we knew the reasons for our sufferings, perhaps it would make things more bearable. But many times, we don't know, and we may never know. There isn't a clear explanation for Job's suffering; however, the book of Job reflects the sovereignty of God. Sometimes God does or allows events to happen just because He said so. That's what my parents would say to me when I'd ask the why question, "Because I said so."

The beauty of our struggles is the instant ability to relate, comfort, and support those who have, or are going through, what we have experienced. In 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 it says, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort,⁴ who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God."

As Dorothy traveled the Yellow Brick Road toward the Emerald City to meet the Wizard, she encountered many adversities along the way. The greatest obstacle for her was the Wicked Witch of the West. Our greatest obstacle is Satan. We all have, and will continue encountering, adversities along our journey of life.

I feel I've met my quota for adversity that would last me the rest of my lifetime. But I know that is not the case. Even as I was writing my first lecture (cover your ears Carol), I thought to myself, "Why in the world did Carol think that I could even do this? She must be crazy." No, I didn't think that, but I was putting myself under a substantial, unrelenting amount of stress. In my head, I created a scenario of excuses I could tell Carol why I couldn't do the lecture anymore. God is so good. He helped me complete this task and even changed events on my calendar that only He could have done.

Romans 8:28, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

God has a plan for your life and mine. His plan is not always our plan. But we're reminded in John 16:33: "I have told you these things, so that in me you have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

CONCLUSION:

As mentioned earlier, water can have a powerful effect. One of the most powerful effects of water is the cleansing of our souls through baptism. It can wash our sins and sanitize our lives. The Living Water gives life, but if you're the Wicked Witch of the West, it gives death. Coming to Jesus, we can live without condemnation. We can handle any devastation, hurricane/floods that come our way because we can do all things through him who gives us strength. [Philippians 4:13] It's reassuring to know when it pours, or even a slight rain, we can run for cover under the umbrella of God.

All Dorothy wanted in the Wizard of Oz was to go home where she felt safe, loved, and cared for by her family. We too can find that same peace, love, and safety that surpasses all understanding in the home of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

PRAYER:

Father God there may be people in this room (and online) that are hurting today and if not, they probably know someone who is. You work in mysterious ways. Whether you reveal the reason for our sufferings or not, help us to keep our eyes on You, to be a good and faithful servant like Your servant, Job. Amen.

Stand for the Doxology.