

**Holy Cross Lutheran Church
Adult Bible Class
The Book of Job
September 16, 2020**

We began the second decade of the 21st century with all sorts of references to having 20/20 vision and being aware of the world in which we live, but not many foresaw the world we are living in now. It has been a year of huge tragedy. Civil Unrest, floods in Africa, the massive explosion in Beirut, wildfires, murder hornets, and of course, the COVID-19 pandemic. Not too many people can honestly say they saw this coming!

All of this has brought a great level of suffering to the world. With suffering comes the eternal question, "Why?" The Book of Job was perhaps the first of the 66 Books of the Bible to be written down and it digs deeply into that question. In Job 1:1-6 we meet a man who has it all. By Job 2:10 he has lost it all. His family is gone; his wealth is gone; his health is gone. His wife looks at him and encourages him to "curse God and die." For the next 34 chapters the book offers all kinds of explanations about why evil happens to good people. Our challenge for the next few weeks will be to dig into those explanations and evaluate them. Then we will hear God himself address Job and us.

Some Background on Job

- Events likely took place sometime between Abraham and Moses (2200 BC to 1500 BC) but may be earlier.
- Job may have been a distant relative of Abraham.
- Job was the "greatest man of all the people in the east."
- The land of Uz is a bit of a mystery. It was east of the Jordan River, perhaps as far east as the Euphrates.

Outline of the Book

The Book of Job is an epic poem which can make it hard to read, but the book has a very straightforward outline:

- I. Job 1-2 – The downfall of Job (narrative)
- II. Job 2-31 – Dialog between Job and his 3 friends
- III. Job 32 – 37 Job and Elihu
- IV. Job 38 – 41 God's Answer to Job
- V. Job 42 Job's repentance and restoration

Luther on Job

The book of Job deals with the question, whether misfortune comes from God even to the righteous. Job stands firm and contends that God torments even the righteous without cause other than that this be to God's praise, as Christ also testifies in John 9[:3] of the man who was born blind ... But this is written for our comfort, that God allows even his great saints to falter, especially in adversity. For before Job comes into fear of death, he praises God at the theft of his goods and the death of his children ... This is the finest part of this book. It is understood

only by those who also experience and feel what it is to suffer the wrath and judgment of God, and to have his grace hidden.¹

Job 1:1-5 - Job's Paradise

That Job lived in the "east" may be a subtle reference to Genesis 2:8 where the Garden of Eden is described as being "in the east." Intentional or not, Job's life has the feel of a paradise. He has a large family, he owns vast numbers of animals, and has many servants. His family enjoys great harmony gathering often to celebrate birthdays in feasts that went on for days. In addition, Job fears God, does what is right and even plays the role of priest, offering sacrifices for his family in case they have accidentally cursed God in their celebrations.

Job 1:6-12 - God Holds Court

The scene on Job 1:6-12 is set in deliberate parallel to the scene of Job's home. As Job enjoys the company of his family so also God gathers with his beloved sons. However, who are the sons of God and who is "the Satan" that comes to join their gathering? Much has been written on these mysterious terms, but the most straightforward answer is likely the best answer:

- Sons of God is a reference to the angels
- The Satan is a reference to the Devil (the word Satan means adversary)

The Evil One has come into the court of God after his wanderings of the earth – he prowls about like a lion looking for something to devour (1 Peter 5:8). God asks him if he has considered Job, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. Here is where the intrigue begins. God offers up Job to be tested. When tragedy happens, we often say that God "allowed" the bad things to happen, without himself being the author of the challenge that has come our way. This conversation reminds us that God isn't just a passive bystander to our pain, but at times actually afflicts his people.

- Hebrews 12:5-11 – God's discipline of his children often involves suffering. The Hebrew Christians were in danger of falling away when suffering came their way, but it is at times God's way of refocussing our faith upon himself.
- 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 – Paul is "given" a messenger of Satan that he might know God's power made perfect in weakness.
- Matthew 26:39 – The cross does not just happen to Jesus. His suffering and his death are the explicit will of God the Father.
- Lamentations 3:31-33 – God does cause grief, but is not a vengeful, angry God. Greater by far is his compassion and mercy.

Luther divided God works into two categories. His alien work and his proper work. God's alien work is the work of the Law – sin and its consequences. His proper work is salvation to all who believe the Gospel. The former serves the latter.

¹ Engelbrecht, E. A. (2009). *The Lutheran Study Bible* (p. 780). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

Satan grabs the bait! He immediately challenges Job's piety and God's character.

- If God removes the "hedge" from around Job his piety will fall apart. If there is nothing in this for Job, he will turn away from God. Perhaps Job's faith is just glorified self-interest.
- If God removes the "hedge" is he worthy of anyone's worship? Who would worship a god who brings/allows suffering into the lives of his people?

God allows Satan to bring calamity to Job. While he is not allowed to lay a hand on Job himself, Satan can attach all Job has.

Job 1:13-19 - Job Loses Family and Possessions

Four messengers come to Job in quick succession, each with horrific news:

- The Sabeans have raided and struck down his oxen, donkeys, and servants
- A fire from heaven has consumed the sheep and servants
- The Chaldeans have raided and stolen the camels and killed the servants
- A great wind has caused the house of Job's eldest son to collapse killing all Job's children who were inside celebrating.

Job 1:20-22 - Job's Response

Job's response to all this tragedy comes in two formats. First, he engages in the rituals of mourning, shaving his head, tearing his clothes, and prostrating himself before the Lord. Then, he speaks.

²¹ And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."

Job responds in precisely the way Satan said he would not respond. Rather than cursing God, he blesses God. Often when trouble comes into our lives we respond in some pretty predictable ways.

- Moralism— Why is God punishing me? Maybe if I have more faith God will relent? God plays tit or tat.
- Cynicism – the randomness of life. Crap happens. If there is a God, he is incompetent. No one is really in charge.

By God's grace, Job avoids both responses. Like Solomon in Ecclesiastes 5:15 Job realizes he came into the world empty handed and will take nothing with him when he dies. He also acknowledges that his life is in God's hands:

²⁷ These all look to you,
to give them their food in due season.
²⁸ When you give it to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.
²⁹ When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.

³⁰When you send forth your Spirit, they are created,
and you renew the face of the ground.

Psalm 104: 27-30

“In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.” With this we come to the end of the first chapter of this epic book. Job’s life is in tatters, but his faith is intact.