

Holy Cross Lutheran Church

Adult Bible Class

The Book of Job

October 21, 2020

Suffering and the Cross

Early in the Reformation, Martin Luther wrestled with issues of salvation, suffering, and divine punishment similar to those in the Book of Job. He noted that some theologians argued simply that if people obtained grace by doing righteous acts, God would reward them, and if people lived in unrighteousness, God would punish them. This is how Job's friends looked at things. Job was being punished for his sin and the sooner he realized that the better he would be. This thinking is very real yet today.

Suffering and Righteousness

At the Heidelberg Disputation in April 1518, Luther presented the following points. They introduce a biblical perspective on righteousness and suffering.

The person who believes that he can obtain grace by doing what is in him adds sin to sin so that he becomes doubly guilty. [In short, you can't work your way out of sin.]

It is certain that man must utterly despair of his own ability before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ.

Luther went on to argue that theologians who taught people to seek God's grace through good works and victorious living mislead people about how God works through suffering. They could never truly understand the good and the sufferings that the righteous experience in life.

That wisdom which sees the invisible things of God in works as perceived by man is completely puffed up, blinded, and hardened. [Your present circumstances, good or bad are not the true indicator of God's blessing on your life.]

He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross. [God's will is most clearly revealed on the cross and in the suffering of his Son Jesus Christ.]

The Theology of the Cross

The righteous *do* suffer! And through their suffering God works His mercy and salvation. Later that same year, in his explanations of the Ninety-five Theses, Luther commented further on the theology of the cross:

A theologian of the cross (that is, one who speaks of the crucified and hidden God), teaches that punishments, crosses, and death are the most precious treasury of all.... Indeed fortunate and blessed is he who is considered by God to be so worthy that these treasures of the relics of Christ should be given to him; rather, who understands that they are given to him. For to whom are they not offered? As St. James says, "Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials" (James 1:2). For not all have this grace and glory to receive these treasures, but only the most elect of the children of God."

When Trials Come

In this sin-broken world, you will experience suffering. When trials come, do not automatically conclude that God is punishing you for a sin. Certainly, confess and repent of whatever sins you know. But also entrust your body and life to the One who accomplishes His purposes in the midst of suffering. See the world with Job's eyes, and behold the countenance of Jesus, your Redeemer, who bore the price of your salvation.

Troubles are not always punishments or signs of wrath. Indeed, terrified consciences should be taught that there are more important purposes for afflictions (**2 Corinthians 12:9 -- But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.**) so that they do not think God is rejecting them when they see nothing but God's punishment and anger in troubles. The other more important purposes are to be considered, that is, that God is doing His strange work so that He may be able to do His own work.¹

Job's Faith

Job lived at least 3500 years before Luther but is a prime example of what Luther is taught. His present circumstances, terrible as they are, do not mean he has lost favour with God or is being punished for his failings. One of the remarkable things about Job's responses to his three friends is that he shows a very strong faith in God's care for him even in his suffering. This is remarkable because Job did not have many of the things we take as essential to keeping our faith healthy. For example, he had no Bible, no congregation that gathered weekly to attend, no pastor to turn to, etc. Like others of his time, he did not even have a full picture of God's plan to deliver the world from sin in Christ. Yet, like Abraham, Noah and others in similar circumstances he remains steadfast and as we know that is really the work of the Holy Spirit in his life.

Looking at Job's responses to his friends we can see several distinct themes emerge:

1. **God is in Control** – there is no doubt that his suffering is within the plans and purposes of God

- **Job 6:4**
"For the arrows of the Almighty are in me; my spirit drinks their poison; the terrors of God are arrayed against me."
- **Job 30:16–22**
"And now my soul is poured out within me;
days of affliction have taken hold of me. ...
God has cast me into the mire,
and I have become like dust and ashes.
I cry to you for help and you do not answer me;
I stand, and you only look at me.
You have turned cruel to me;
with the might of your hand you persecute me.
You lift me up on the wind; you make me ride on it,
and you toss me about in the roar of the storm."

2. **God is Just** – Though Job is angry with God he does not despise the righteousness of God

- **Job 9:19**

“If it is a contest of strength, behold, he is mighty! If it is a matter of justice, who can summon him?”

- **Job 31:5-7**

“If I have walked with falsehood
and my foot has hastened to deceit;
⁶ (Let me be weighed in a just balance,
and let God know my integrity!)
⁷ if my step has turned aside from the way
and my heart has gone after my eyes,
and if any spot has stuck to my hands”

3. **God is forgiving.** Job’s suffering is not part of some grand plan to tear him down for his sins.

- **Job 7:21**

“Why do you not pardon my transgression
and take away my iniquity?
For now I shall lie in the earth;
you will seek me, but I shall not be.”

- **Job 14:16–17**

“For then you would number my steps;
you would not keep watch over my sin;
my transgression would be sealed up in a bag,
and you would cover over my iniquity.”

4. **God Cares for Job** even though he is going through this suffering

- **Job 10:8-12**

“Your hands fashioned and made me,
and now you have destroyed me altogether.
⁹ Remember that you have made me like clay;
and will you return me to the dust?
¹⁰ Did you not pour me out like milk
and curdle me like cheese?
¹¹ You clothed me with skin and flesh,
and knit me together with bones and sinews.
¹² You have granted me life and steadfast love,
and your care has preserved my spirit.”

- **Job 23:13-17**

“But he is unchangeable, and who can turn him back?

What he desires, that he does.

¹⁴ For he will complete what he appoints for me,
and many such things are in his mind.

¹⁵ Therefore I am terrified at his presence;
when I consider, I am in dread of him.

¹⁶ God has made my heart faint;
the Almighty has terrified me;

¹⁷ yet I am not silenced because of the darkness,
nor because thick darkness covers my face.

This is huge faith! Job confesses God’s power and at the same time his grace and care for his people. But this is just the tip of the iceberg of Job’s faith. From early on in his responses to his friends he knows he cannot ascend into heaven and talk directly with God. He will need the services of a mediator, someone to speak in his behalf in the courts of the Almighty.

Job 9:32-35

“He is not a mere mortal like me that I might answer him,
that we might confront each other in court.

³³ If only there were someone to mediate between us,
someone to bring us together,

³⁴ someone to remove God’s rod from me,
so that his terror would frighten me no more.

³⁵ Then I would speak up without fear of him,
but as it now stands with me, I cannot.

As he passes through his trials Job becomes convinced there is a mediator – one who will speak for him

Job 16:18-21

“Earth, do not cover my blood;
may my cry never be laid to rest!

¹⁹ Even now my witness is in heaven;
my advocate is on high.

²⁰ My intercessor is my friend
as my eyes pour out tears to God;

²¹ on behalf of a man he pleads with God
as one pleads for a friend.

And in time the picture becomes clearer to Job as to where his hope lies. Not only does he have an advocate, but also a kinsman-redeemer, someone who will lift him from his sufferings:

Job 19:23-27

“Oh, that my words were recorded,
that they were written on a scroll,
²⁴ that they were inscribed with an iron tool on lead,
or engraved in rock forever!
²⁵ I know that my redeemer lives,
and that in the end he will stand on the earth.
²⁶ And after my skin has been destroyed,
yet in my flesh I will see God;
²⁷ I myself will see him
with my own eyes—I, and not another.
How my heart yearns within me!

Though we do not often think of Job as a prophet, in his own way he was just that!! In his sufferings he points us to the Mediator and Redeemer who would come to save us.

1 John 2:1-2 “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”

Job was a theologian of the Cross! He clearly points us to the Saviour who will suffer on the Cross as our Redeemer and who now is our advocate with the Father!

¹ Adapted from Engelbrecht, E. A. (2009). *The Lutheran Study Bible* (p. 837). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.