

I Choose To Bless

"Pain-filled Worship"

Job 1:1-2:10

Mark Vroegop

1 There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. 2 There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. 3 He possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys, and very many servants, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east. 4 His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. 5 And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually.

6 Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. 7 The Lord said to Satan, "From where have you come?" Satan answered the Lord and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." 8 And the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" 9 Then Satan answered the Lord and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason? 10 Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. 11 But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face." 12 And the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand." So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.

13 Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, 14 and there came a messenger to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, 15 and the Sabeans fell upon them and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." 16 While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you." 17 While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "The Chaldeans formed three groups and made a raid on the camels and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." 18 While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, 19 and behold, a great wind came across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they are dead, and I alone have escaped to tell you."

20 Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. 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."

22 In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.

2:1 Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the Lord. 2 And the Lord said to Satan, "From where have you come?" Satan answered the Lord and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." 3 And the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason." 4 Then Satan answered the Lord and said, "Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. 5 But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." 6 And the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life."

7 So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. 8 And he took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes.

9 Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die." 10 But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips. (Job 1:1-2:10)

Without suffering we would have never known a book called Pilgrim's Progress. John Bunyan was willingly imprisoned for 12 years because he refused to abide by the 1662 Act of Uniformity where all pastors were required to become a part of the Church of England. As a matter of conscience, he chose imprisonment rather than violate his call to preach. And it was during that time that Bunyan wrote Pilgrim's Progress which is likely the most translated book other than the Bible, translated into more than 200 languages.

Bunyan, in his autobiography *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, was reflecting on how he was able to survive and thrive in the midst of this dark season. He quotes 2 Corinthians 1:9, "We had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead." Reflecting on that verse he wrote,

"By this scripture I was made to see that if ever I would suffer rightly, I must **first** pass **a sentence of death** upon everything that can be properly called a thing of this life, even to reckon to myself, my wife, my children, my health, my enjoyment, and all, as dead to me, and myself as dead to them. The **second** was, **to live upon God that is invisible**¹, as Paul said in another place; the way to not faith is to look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen for the things that are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal..."²

Listen to the wisdom of a life-long and chosen sufferer: 1) pass a sentence of death on everything, and 2) learn to live on God who is visible. That is how a jail cell in Bedford, England, became a sanctuary of blessing and not cursing. Bunyan learned how to weep and worship. He learned how to suffer while being satisfied in his God.

¹ Bunyan borrows the phrase from Hebrews 11:27 where we are told that Moses "endured as seeing him who is invisible.

² Quoted in John Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2001), 42-43.

The “who?” question is far more satisfying than the “why?” question. In other words, there will always be mystery when it comes to suffering. We are not given all the answers as to why hard things happen. We are not given explanations, justifications, or reasons. Instead, we are told Who is behind them, that He intends everything – including pain – for our good, and that He is worthy of our trust. The question then that we must deal with is this: Is my view of God big enough and deep enough for what I do not see in this life? Or, is what I know about God big enough and deep enough for what I do not know now?

For many people, the answer is “No!” They curse God over the difficulties that have come. They become bitter or angry at God because of what has happened. Or worse, they walk away from Christ because they cannot love a God who could have prevented the pain.

The aim for this seven week series is to help you learn how to cling to “who?” instead of “why?” My desire is to try and help you see the beauty of choosing to bless the name of the Lord in the midst of your darkest hour, how to choose a path of humble gratitude when you are hurting, and how to learn to live on Him who is invisible.

Today we tackle chapter one and a brief portion of chapter two as we discover the beginning of the story of Job, and what it means to be a pain-filled worshipper.

The Character of Job

The book begins with a five verses that identify who Job is and what he is like. The author presents him as a righteous and blessed man. Notice the following:

- **His name is Job** (v 1). He lives in the land of Uz which is probably northeast of the Sea of Galilee since that area would support his agrarian and livestock needs (v 1). He is not an Israelite.
- **He is righteous** (v 1). His godliness is described as “blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.” Although he is not from Israel, he worships the one, true God. He is not perfect; after all he offers sacrifices. Rather, this is a way that Bible describes a man who is a model of righteousness.
- **He is wealthy** (v 3). We see the scope of his wealth (v 3): 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys, and very many servants. The summary would be that “he was the greatest of all the people of the east” (v 3).
- **He has a happy home** (v 2, 4). He has seven sons and three daughters (the numbers indicate completion), and his children regularly gather at each others’ house for time of feasting. They are like the Waltons of Uz.
- **He is diligent** (v 5). Job sees his role as family priest, offering sacrifices for his children after their feast days just in case they may have cursed God in their hearts. Verse five says, “thus Job did continually.”

This is Job, a man who is wealthy, happy, and righteous. This is stunning. He is truly blessed!

Behind the Scenes

In order to understand Job, it is important to realize that you, as the reader, have the whole story. You know what is really happening. You see the plot above the plot. And you are introduced to that plot in verse six.

The text indicates that there was a day when all of the heavenly beings³ came to present themselves before the Lord. And present in the gathering is Satan. The writer seems to want to picture a heavenly court over which Yahweh (thus LORD or "I am") is seated as supreme. Notice how many times the name LORD is used.⁴

The Lord engages Satan in dialogue (v 7) saying, "From where have you come?" And Satan's response is "from going to and fro on the earth and from walking up and down on it." So far so good. But then God does something interesting. He points the spotlight of focus toward Job saying, "Have you considered my servant Job, there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" This is an interesting thing to say – like a jewelry store clerk who, while being robbed says, "Did you see the five carat diamond in the front case? It's our most expensive piece."

Satan's response is telling (v 9-11). He suggests that the only reason that Job fears God is because of self-interest. In other words, Satan believes that Job is religious because of what he can get out of it. Take away the blessings and everything will collapse. Satan says, "stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face" (v 11).

And here we see some very important things to note:

1. From the beginning we see that nothing in Job's life is accidental. God is behind it, while not morally culpable for it. There is a divine intentionality behind the events of Job's life. It is God who turns the spotlight on Job. Satan describes the difficulties as "your hand" and "touch all that he has."
2. Satan's primary accusation is against God and Job: "Is God so good that He can be loved for Himself, not just for His gifts? Can a man hold on to God when there are no benefits attached?"⁵
3. Cursing God is what Satan wants and what Job had feared for his children. You will see this develop even further (e.g., 2:5, 2:9), but for now just note the battle line is drawn between blessing and cursing. Cursing God is a game-set-match victory for Satan.

³ Literally "Sons of God." This phrase is likely a summary statement to describe those who are created by God and are subservient to him. It has broad range of meaning. Therefore, I do not think that this phrase is connected to the description in Genesis 6:2.

⁴ 14 times from 1:6-2:10

⁵ Francis Anderson, Job – Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press), 84.

Calamity Yields Worship

The result of the heavenly conversation is that Satan is given permission to bring disaster upon Job, but he cannot touch him. Notice here that it is Satan who is doing the evil, not God. He has allowed it, permitted it, sanctioned it, and ordained it. But Satan is the means.

Four disasters are listed, and they strike at everything he has. The Sabeans stole the oxen and donkeys, killing all the servants (v 14-15). Fire of God fell from heaven, killing all the sheep and servants (v 16). The Chaldeans stole the camels, killing all the servants (v 17). And the most tragic of all comes next: All of his children are killed in a building collapse (v 18-19).

But notice Job's response: grieving worship. That may be a new category for some of you. He tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell on the ground (v 20). These are all actions of deep grief. And in his grief, he does not curse. Rather, he worships. Here is what he says, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." He blessed and did not curse. He chose to bless. He chose to not "charge God with wrong." Job passed the first test.

Behind the Scenes Again

The scene shifts back to heaven again. God and Satan engage in a repeat of the former conversation. The context (2:1), God's question (v 2), and Satan's response (v 2) are all the same. The spotlight on Job is nearly identical except that God adds, "He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without cause (v 3)."

Satan ups the ante. He argues that Job's trials are still not enough to level the playing field. He believes that touching his body will certainly result in a collapse of faith. "Stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh and he will curse you to your face."

Once again, God grants permission with the restraint that Satan cannot kill him.

Suffering Yields Trust

The suffering of Job now takes on a new level. He is afflicted with "loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head" (v 7). We have no idea what kind of illness Job suffered.⁶ But we do know by Job's own description in his speeches how his condition presented. His illness involved itching (2:8), disfiguration (2:12), sores that scab over, crack, and ooze (7:5), sores infected with worms (7:5), fever with chills (21:6), darkening and shriveling of the skin (30:30), eyes red and swollen from weeping (16:16), intestinal distress (30:27), sleeplessness and delirium (7:4, 13-14), bad breath (19:17), emaciation (19:20), and excruciating pain throughout his body (30:17).⁷

⁶ In deference to those who medical minds would like to posit a suggestion, here are a few illnesses that are suggested in the commentaries: pemphigus foliaceus, mycosis fungoides, diabetes mellitus, or furunculosis.

⁷ John Hartley, The Book of Job – NICT, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 82.

Job retreats to the ash heap which was likely the place that garbage was collected. He may be quarantining himself or it may have been a deep expression of grief. This was the place where outcasts lived.

But what comes next must have been a devastating blow. The love of his life, the mother to their deceased children, and his life-long companion says, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die" (v 9). Her words must have cut so deep.

Instead of seeing his integrity as his greatest asset, she curses it as a failure to live in the real world. Job is suffering, and she implores him ("curse" and "die" are imperatives) to shorten his misery (and hers). Their suffering and misery was too much for her to bear. But she fails to realize that her emotional, short-sighted, and panicked words reflected exactly what Satan wanted. She echoed Satan's accusation – "all that a man has will he give for his own life."⁸ His soul-mate was unknowingly advocating Satan's plan.

And once again we see Job's amazing righteousness. He responds with a measured rebuke,⁹ suggesting that she is speaking foolishly. Job refuses to find a false way to escape from his suffering and expresses his unwavering allegiance to God.¹⁰ And here we see the major difference between them: she wanted relief over righteousness.

Job's answer, posed in a question, is critically important. "Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" Two words you have to understand. First, "evil" does not necessarily mean sinful. Rather it means something bad, disastrous, or painful. Secondly, the verb "to receive" means an active, positive participation in what God decrees, not mere passive reception.¹¹ It means that you see something as good or blessed by God. Put that together and hear what he says. We must be thankful for the good that comes from God and we must be thankful for those things that are hard. We are to humbly receive both – to see that bounty and bruising are consecrated and ordained by God. Both bounty and bruising are blessed when you bless the name of the One who is behind them.

The final summary thought leaves us amazed and convicted: "In all this Job did not sin with his lips" (v 9b).

Building an Altar for Pain-Filled Worship

Learning to live on God who is invisible means that you have determined that "who?" is more important, satisfying, and comforting than "why?" It means that you, like Job, determine that you will take what could have destroyed your faith, and instead you use it as a platform for worship. It means that you have already answered the question: Is God so good that He can be loved for Himself, and not just His gifts? The answer is eternally YES! But how?

⁸ Hartley, 84.

⁹ ESV Study Bible – note on 2:10

¹⁰ Hartley, 84.

¹¹ Ibid.

The answer lies in four questions that serve as the foundation for pain-filled worship.

1. Focus: Why am I here? Back to 1:21 – “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return.” What is Job saying? He understood what life is all about. He knew that life is not about the enjoyment of the gifts of life over the Giver of life. He knew his place as creature, and God as creator. There is no tone of rights violated, questions unanswered, or injustice applied. Instead, there is grief—deep, gut-wrenching grief—that expresses itself in torn clothes and a shaved head. But yet, there is worship.

The first rock of this altar is focus – a cultivated orientation of the heart that says, “Yea, though he slay me, yet I will bless Him.” I’m not here for things and stuff and family and friends. I’m not here for enjoyments and happiness – as good and right as all of those are. I am here to worship.

One of the most meaningful songs for me during our darkest hours was:

Here I am to worship,
Here I am to bow down,
Here I am to say that you're my God,
You're altogether lovely,
Altogether worthy,
Altogether wonderful to me.

The first thing to note is that we must cultivate a worshipping heart. Focus.

2. Theology: What is my view of God? Again 1:21 – “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away.” Job has a robust understanding of the sovereignty of God over all events – even hard and disappointing things. I call it hard providence. Providence because it is ordained by Him, and “hard” because it is not easy. Our text clearly indicates that nothing happens to Job that isn’t part and parcel of God’s will for him. God is in control of everything even if we don’t fully know how or if it seems in tension.

Now we must be careful here because some of you may wonder if God is therefore an accomplice of evil. I would commend D.A. Carson’s book, How Long O Lord, for a full treatment of this, but let me quote him on this matter:

“Despite everything it says about the limitless reaches of God’s sovereignty, the Bible insists again and again on God’s unblemished goodness. God is never presented as an accomplice of evil or as secretly malicious, or as standing behind evil in exactly the same way that he stands behind good.”¹²

Pain-filled worship flows from a heart that says, “I know that you are good and that you are in control!”

¹² D.A. Carson, How Long O Lord? – Reflections on Suffering and Evil, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1990), 205.

3. Affections: What do I really love? “Blessed be the name of the Lord” (1:21). Job chooses to bless the Lord in the midst of the loss of everything that he has. His love for God was not conditional upon the gifts that God had given. Job loved the Lord in blessing; he loved the Lord in bruising. He loved the Lord in luxury and he loved the Lord in loss.

I tremble at those two words: luxury and loss. Both of them have often been the means of spiraling affections for God. Luxury and loss both test our penchant for self-sufficiency. One by thinking, “I did this myself!” And the other by thinking, “How dare you do this to me.”

So when it comes to pain and suffering the question is: When God brings you to the end of yourself will you feel love or rage?

4. Trust: What will I rely upon? 2:1 – “Shall we receive good from God and shall we not receive evil?” The beautiful point that Job makes here is that God knows what we need. Both good and hardship are gifts! But to believe that and to live by it is to make the choice to trust. You may not see the reason, the point, or the purpose. But you can always trust. You can always cling to the “who?” question.

And so for many of us that is where the real battle lies? Will I trust? You see you will never be able to turn pain into a platform for worship unless you are willing to trust

Focus. Theology. Affections. Trust. Those are the foundations of an altar of pain-filled worship. It means, that we like Job learn to declare “blessed be your name.”

John Bunyan counted his years in the Bedford jail a gift from the Lord. He learned to live on God who is invisible.

“Let me beg of thee, that thou wilt not be offended either with God, or men, if the cross is laid heavy upon thee. Not with God, for he doth nothing with a cause, nor with men...for they are the servants of God to thee for good. Take therefore what comes to thee from God by them thankfully.”¹³

¹³ Quoting John Piper, The Hidden Smile of God, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2001), 72.

I graduated from Nursing school in April of 2007 and moved to Indianapolis in May to start my first job at Riley Children's Hospital on the Intensive Care Unit. Although I grew up in a strong Christian home and made significant strides forward spiritually in my walk with Christ in college, I was blown away by the tragedies that I witnessed at Riley: children, dying of cancer, car accidents, birth defect, and, worst of all, those beaten and abused by their very own parents. I remember, during orientation, going home to my apartment every night after I worked, and, weeping, for hours over these children, often asking the "why" question. After doing this for several weeks, it began to drain the life out of me. I became exhausted, physically, emotionally and spiritually. One night, while all alone in my apartment, the Holy Spirit finally grabbed a hold of my heart and I sensed Christ wooing me to Himself saying "Come unto me, my weary & heavy laden child and I will give you rest." My heart broke before the Lord and I began pouring myself out to Him. As I did, God began to change my heart. I stopped asking "why" and started to focus on who HE was and what HE had done for me. I remembered that HE is my refuge and strength, an ever present help in time of trouble. That HE is my shepherd who is with me in the valley of the shadow of death. That HE restores my soul. That HE works all things out for the good of those who love HIM. That HE is holy and the one from whom all blessings flow. That HE has good plans for my life. That HE will one day wipe away every tear from my eyes. I began to fix my eyes not on the earthly pain that I experienced, but on the things above, on my good, holy, just and miracle-working God.

Today, I am still working on the ICU at Riley, but only by the grace of God. There are days when I still come home and weep over my patients and the tragedy's that I see on an almost daily basis- but the reason for my weeping has changed. I weep over the effect of sin that I see in this world. I weep, because I see how messed up this world is because things aren't the way that God intended them to be. I weep because i long for the day when Christ will come back and make ALL things new and suffering, death, tears etc. will be no more.

So that's my story. God has taught me so much about suffering, and like you shared last week, through all of it, I have learned that answering the "why" question, doesn't bring answers but only leaves you exhausted and empty. I have learned that by clinging to Christ; by resting in His promises, trusting in His sovereignty, and relying on His unchangeable character, I am able to praise God in the storm and have hope even through the tears and sorrow.

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