

BIBLE STUDIES

*“Men From The Past With A Message For The Present”***JOB: THE SUFFERING OF A SIFTED SAINT**
The Book of Job

“There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil. And seven sons and three daughters were born to him. Also, his possessions were seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred female donkeys, and a very large household, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the East.” (Job 1:1-3)

Why do bad things happen to good people? If anyone had a right to ask that question it was the Bible character named Job. He is a shining example of one who suffered and yet survived and even thrived. Job was felled by pain but he arose to reign.

The problem of human suffering is almost as old as the human race itself. It began in the Garden of Eden, almost at the dawn of human history. The father and mother of the race suffered as a consequence of sin and therefore, suffering has been the lot of every generation and every individual since. There is no such thing as pain free living. If you suffer, thank God! It is a sure sign that you are still alive. To live is to suffer; to benefit from suffering is to understand its purpose.

Suffering affects every part of our being - soul, spirit, mind and body. In the story of Job we see that he suffered in all of those ways even though he was a righteous man! “He was honest inside and out, a man of his word, who was totally devoted to God and hated evil with a passion.” (v.1 *The Message*)

“No pain, no gain.”

A common saying is, “No pain, no gain.” However, most persons who glibly say that, never pause to contemplate what is the advantage in the adversity they experience. It is very difficult for those who operate on the basis of reason alone to see profit in pain. They equate all suffering with loss. No so! There is gain in pain if we are attuned to God’s purposes. Sometimes man’s inflictions are God’s intentions, as was the case with Joseph. All of us could learn from what he said to his brothers who caused him pain: *“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”* (Gen. 50:20)

A.W. Tozer recognized advantage in adversity when he said, “It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until He has hurt him deeply.” In this same vein William Penn wrote, “No thorns, no throne; no gall, no glory; no cross, no crown.” There is no resurrection without the cross. When God allows suffering, it is not to ruin us but to refine us. This explains the “why” in the Job story.

Job Was A Sifted Saint

Sifting is a way of refining. Job and Peter are just two of the examples of righteous persons who were put through the sieve of testing. Jesus said to Peter, *“Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail.”* (Luke 22:31)

Jesus told Peter that he was to be sifted; God did not tell Job that he was to be sifted. In fact, God brought Job to Satan’s attention: *“Then 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, one who fears God and shuns evil?”* (Job 1:8) This could well be the best complement that God ever paid to mortal man!

How Was Job Sifted?

Before answering that question, let us review who was sifted. We are told that Job had *“seven sons and three daughters were born to him. Also, his possessions were seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred female donkeys, and a very large household, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the East.”* (Job 1:2-4)

Here was a righteous and rich man, who seemingly had everything heart could desire, yet he was subjected to the sieve of suffering. Sifting is a process whereby the imperfections and/or impurities are sifted out. God permitted Job to be sifted in the following ways:

JOB WAS SIFTED BY HIS FOE.

Satan, the Accuser, came before God claiming that the only reason why Job was faithful was because God had blessed him with wealth and if God took His hand off of Job, Job would curse God. God allowed Satan to sift Job.

He attempted to drive a wedge between Job and God. In a short span of time, Job lost his children, his wealth and even his health. In spite of these calamities, Job maintained his integrity and faith. In this, Job gives us a great example to follow when we find ourselves in the midst of great adversity because of the attacks of the devil.

Satan is also our foe and he wants to rob us of all of God’s blessings. Paul writes to the Corinthians that Satan is *“the god of this world”* and his ultimate goal is to keep sinners *“from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”* (II Cor.4:4) As the poet states,

*“To lose your wealth is much,
To lose your health is more;
To lose your soul is such a loss
That nothing can restore.”*

The Apostle Peter, who also had his run-ins with the enemy of our souls, gives us warning as well as advice about dealing with the devil: *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you*

have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (I Peter 5:8-11)

Satan’s power over the children of God is limited. He had to get permission from God to take Job’s children, health and wealth. Satan was limited to that which God allowed. Because Satan cannot exceed the limits that God sets, we have no reason to fear Satan’s attacks. We must be on guard and not allow any experience to drive a wedge between us and God. We cannot control how Satan attacks, we can choose how we will respond when it happens. Satan is still the accuser of the children of God but his end is already foretold: *“Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, “Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.” (Rev. 12:10)*

JOB WAS SIFTED BY HIS FAMILY.

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

If there ever was a time when Job needed words of sympathy, love and understanding it was in this hour. Nevertheless, he received from his wife a rebuke and an evil suggestion. She became the helpmeet who was a hindrance.

Job makes reference to his wife only one more time. He says, *“My breath is strange to my wife, though I entreated for the children’s sake of mine own body.” (Job 19:17 kjv)* From this it would seem that even his wife had regarded him as an object of divine displeasure and had also left him to suffer alone.

Of course, Job’s physical condition, admittedly, was loathsome, his body being covered with boils. *“And he took for himself a potsherd with which to scrape himself while he sat in the midst of the ashes. Then his wife said to him, “Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!” (Job 2:8,9)* If anyone needed a Care-Giver; a Nurse-Maid; a cool cloth placed on a fevered brow; a tender word of encouragement, it was Job. And who better to give that assistance than his wife?

And another question: where were Job’s other relatives while he was sitting upon an ash-heap scraping his itching boils with a broken piece of pottery? Oh, yes, he did have other relatives! Read the following and then scratch your head: *“Then all his brothers, all his sisters, and all those who had been his acquaintances before, came to him and ate food with him in his house....” (Job 42:11)*

When did they come? After Job’s ordeal had ended! Where were they when Job needed them? And when they finally came to see Job they are a bunch of moochers! They *“ate food with him in his house.”* Can’t you hear them gushing out their words of sympathy after Job recovered?

I have known people like that – absent during the sickness, the surgery, the sorrow. They paid no visits, sent no cards of comfort, brought no flowers to cheer the hurting one. But

afterward, when the storm had passed, they swoon around the one who is healthy again and pretend to care. Their hypocrisy stinks worse than Job's boils!

We say, "Misery loves company." There is the sense in which that saying means "since I am miserable, I want you to also be miserable!" But there is another meaning to that phrase. Indeed, those who are miserable *need* company. To suffer alone adds suffering to suffering. To be abandoned when suffering is to add insult to injury. Even Jesus cried out on the cross, "*My God! My God! Why have You forsaken Me?*"

JOB WAS SIFTED BY HIS FRIENDS.

"Now when Job's three friends heard of all this adversity that had come upon him, each one came from his own place—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. For they had made an appointment together to come and mourn with him, and to comfort him." (Job 2:11)

Job's friends were of a great comfort to him – until they opened their mouths and began to speak! At first they grieved silently, but then they started telling Job that his sin had brought the suffering and loss. They encourage him to confess and repent and turn back to God.

His friends made the often made mistake of trying to be "fixers." They first "fix" the blame for Job's troubles upon Job and then they try to "fix" him by pelting him with answers to questions that he does not ask. His response? "*Miserable comforters are you all!*" (Job 16:2) And he was right.

"In every generation there are those men and women who pretend to be able to instruct us in a way of life that guarantees that we will be 'healthy, wealthy, and wise.' According to the propaganda of these people, anyone who lives intelligently and morally is exempt from suffering." (Eugene Peterson, Introduction to the book of Job.)

It is interesting that these same persons make sure that they have Health Insurance, a good Primary Care physician and dentist and go to the hospital for common corrective surgeries in about the exact same ratio as those whom they consider "unintelligent and immoral." And, they eventually die, like everyone else, but not without some painful cause!

Job's friends were certain that they were correct in their judgment of him. But in the end, God rebuked them for their pride and arrogance. We must be careful not to judge others who are suffering. In the midst of pain, the sufferer does not need counsel but comfort.

The ministry of comfort is such an important ministry in the life of a church. There are many encouragements in the New Testament to minister to one another. Some of them are:

- Love one another - John 13:34-35
- Care for one another - 1 Corinthians 12:25
- Serve one another - Galatians 5:13
- Bear one another's burdens - Galatians 6:2
- Comfort one another - 1 Thessalonians 4:18
- Consider one another - Hebrews 10:24
- Pray for one another - James 5:16
- Have compassion one to another - 1 Peter 3:8

- Be hospitable one to another - 1 Peter 4:9

Ethel H. McCauley wrote an excellent article in this regard entitled, "Where Were You?" I have excerpted some of it as follows:

"Where were you when I needed you so much? You knew. I was careful to send word to you. I thought, like the Samaritan of old, you would bind up my wounds. If you did not know what to say, just two words, 'I care,' would have sufficed. I know – you were busy. But when my world crumbled about me like a castle in the sand, I needed your visit. You were not aware that there were times I feared even my Heavenly Father had forsaken me."

"You were not conscious of the times I went to my mail box looking for a letter or card of encouragement, only to find it empty. I am better now. There are scars in my heart that others do not see. If I met you today, I would shake your hand. I could even smile. But, down deep, I no longer consider you my close friend. When I needed you most, you were not there."

We call those types of friends, "Fair weather friends." A true friend, "*Loves at all times*" (Prov.17:17) and, thank God! there are those friends "*who stick closer than a brother.*" (Prov.18:24)

D. JOB WAS SIFTED BY HIS FATHER.

We must not forget that Job's Heavenly Father initiated the entire sifting scenario by calling Satan's attention to Job: "*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, one who fears God and shuns evil?'*" (Job 1:8)

Job was God's exhibit "A" among the saints of his day, and God said in essence, "See if you can turn Job against me," knowing that Job would prove to be true blue. So Satan did his worst and Job came through with flying colors. God knew that Job was a jewel, for God was the Jeweler who made him! An unknown writer has formed this truth in poetic verse:

*"When God wants to drill a man,
And thrill a man,
And skill a man
To play the noblest part;
When He yearns with all His heart
To create so great and bold a man
That all the world shall be amazed,
Watch His methods, watch His ways!*

*How He ruthlessly perfects
Whom He royally elects!
How He hammers him and hurts him,
And with mighty blows converts him
Into trial shapes of clay which
Only God understands;
While his tortured heart is crying
And he lifts beseeching hands!*

*How He bends but never breaks
When his good He undertakes;
How He uses whom He chooses,
And with every purpose fuses him:
By every act induces him
To try his splendor out—
God knows what He's about."*

When Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, *"Not as I will, but as you will"*, he understood that he could not be the Father's instrument of redemption without surrendering to the Father's will. If Jesus the Son of God, could not accomplish his Father's will apart from suffering, what makes us think we can accomplish the purposes of God, apart from pain, as long as we are in these frail bodies?

Free Church of Scotland pastor and hymn writer, George Matheson (1842-1906)—who is perhaps best known for his hymn "O Love That Will Not Let Me Go"—once confessed to his "lack of gratitude for a most unpleasant providence." He became totally blind at age 20. While contemplating his ingratitude one day, he wrote, "My God, I have never thanked Thee for my thorn! I have thanked Thee a thousand times for my roses, but never once for my thorn."

Job's finest words reveal his great saintly stature: *"When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold."* And he did. (Job 23:10) Job knew what God was about! James writes, *"You have heard of the patience of Job...."* (James 5:11) Yes, and we have now seen the patience of Job, the most sifted saint in the Bible.

CONCLUSION

I love the way the book of Job ends! God has the last word. He rebukes Job's friends. In the end, Job is restored to health, happiness and wealth. Here is the record:

"And so it was, after the LORD had spoken these words to Job, that the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "My wrath is aroused against you and your two friends, for you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has." (Job 42:7)

"And the LORD restored Job's losses when he prayed for his friends. Indeed the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. Then all his brothers, all his sisters, and all those who had been his acquaintances before, came to him and ate food with him in his house; and they consoled him and comforted him for all the adversity that the LORD had brought upon him. Each one gave him a piece of silver and each a ring of gold. Now the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; for he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, one thousand yoke of oxen, and one thousand female donkeys. He also had seven sons and three daughters." (Job 42:10-14)

SOME LESSONS FOR SAINTS WHO ARE SIFTED:

1. In spite of all the pain, loss and suffering, Job never once gave up on God.
2. Job showed the kind of trust we are to have: *"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him."* (Job 13:15)

3. We need to recognize that when all is stripped away we have all we need in God!
4. “Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is not therefore at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer.” (John Stott)
5. We should never demand that God explain everything to us now. “We’ll understand it better by and by.”
6. Remember that the life to come is painless! *“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”* (Rev.21:4)

“Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.”

(Psalm 30:5)

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