**WHEN THE RIGHTEOUS SUFFER**

**THE LORD GIVES, AND THE LORD TAKES AWAY**

**Job 1:1-22**

**INTRODUCTION**

When I was eighteen years old, my family suffered a terrible tragedy. I was in my first year at McMaster University studying for a test in my dorm room when I received a call from my mom. She was unusually quiet and serious. I could tell right away that something wasn’t right. After a few moments she told me what had happened. Some of our family members were driving to Florida when the driver fell asleep at the wheel, lost control of the vehicle, and crashed in the ditch. He and his family suffered some minor injuries but were ok. But my grandparents, who were also in the car, didn’t make it.

Our family had experienced loss in the past, but not like this. It had never been so sudden or unexpected. My grandparents were healthy and in their early 70’s. We saw them often at family get-togethers and restaurants, and there was no reason to believe that any of that would change. But just like that, they were gone.

As we grieved together with my extended family, I remember one of my cousins asking, “Why did this happen to us? We’re a Christian family. We’re following the Lord. Why would God bring this into our lives?”

Have you ever asked that question before? Perhaps you’ve suffered some tragic, unexpected loss, or you’ve experienced some grave injustice, or you’ve been victimized by the cruelty or the abuse of another person, and you’ve wondered, “Why did that happen? Where is God? What happened to God’s justice?”

That’s what the book of Job is about. Derek Kidner writes,

“What faces us here is the urgent problem of divine justice”

We know that the Bible teaches that God is just. For example:

“For the Lord loves justice; he will not forsake his saints. They are preserved forever, but the children of the wicked shall be cut off.” – Psalm 37:28

“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.” – Psalm 89:14

The Bible teaches that God is good, God is just, and God is sovereign. He loves what is right, and he is completely able to do what is right. So then why do bad things happen to good people? Why do good things happen to bad people?

Last year, a pastor named John Powell died after getting hit by a truck while helping a stranded motorist. He was married and had four young children. Why did he have to die at 38, while Hugh Hefner got to live till he was 91 and die in the comfort of his mansion?

These are questions that raise the urgent problem of divine justice, and no book in the Bible addresses this more directly than Job.

Today we begin a new sermon series on the book of Job called “When the Righteous Suffer”. There are many reasons why we suffer. We suffer because of the natural consequences of our sin, or because we made foolish decisions, but sometimes we suffer despite doing nothing wrong.

That was Job. Job was a righteous man who suffered immeasurable loss. But the book doesn’t spend a lot of time describing what he lost. In fact, all of his loss takes place in the first two chapters. The remaining forty chapters address the pain that he felt, the questions that he had, and the theology that puts it all in perspective.

Job has been called “a neglected treasure of the Christian life” (Christopher Ash). It’s neglected because it’s hard to understand, but that’s exactly what suffering is like. There are no black and white answers when it comes to suffering, and the Bible doesn’t provide them. But it does provide us with a way of seeing more of God through the lens of our suffering so that we would learn to trust him, even in the darkest times.

We will spend at least 16 sermons on Job, which will take us to August or September, as we learn how the Bible equips us for the times when the righteous suffer.

The title of this sermon is **The Lord Gives, and the Lord Takes Away.** We will break up Chapter 1 into three points:

1. Why Job Suffered
2. What Job Suffered
3. How Job Suffered

(1) **WHY JOB SUFFERED**

The book of Job begins with a scene of perfect justice.

**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.

Job is introduced as a man who lived in the land of Uz, a land that was outside of Israel to the East. This tells us that Job wasn’t part of God’s covenant people Israel. And yet, he still knew the Lord and sought to worship him in the best way he knew how. He was like Melchizedek or Jethro, men who did not descend from the bloodlines of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and yet were God-fearing men who worshipped the living God.

Job is described as “blameless and upright”. Whenever the Bible uses these terms, it doesn’t mean perfection or sinlessness. It means living with integrity under God’s law. No one was going to dig up dirt about his past that he kept hidden from the rest of the world. No one was going to accuse him of living under his own law rather than God’s. He conformed his life to the will of God, he took responsibility for his sins and repented of them, and he was committed to living a moral and upright life by the grace of God.

Job was also a man who “feared God and turned away from evil.” The fear of God is the proper response to the knowledge of God, not in the sense of being terrified by God, but in the sense of living in reverential submission to God’s majesty and authority. It’s the experiential reality of acknowledging God’s transcendence, that God is God and we are not, and so we happily turn away from evil and live under his loving rule.

**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.

Job was a good man, but he was also a great man. He had ten children: seven sons and three daughters. He possessed 7000 sheep, 3000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys, and very many servants. He was “the greatest of all the people of the east.” No one in that region of the world had more than him. God blessed him, God prospered him, and God loved him.

**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.

Verse 4 paints a picture of family celebration. His ten children would get together on their birthdays, and they would enjoy their father’s prosperity with a feast. That may sound excessive or indulgent, but there’s no indication of that in the text. This detail is included here as an intimate portrait of the happiness and the unity of this godly family.

But behind all their celebrations is a more serious note.

**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.

Job knows that his children aren’t perfect. He knows that more likely than not they had sinned, and so he makes atonement for them by offering a sacrifice on behalf of each of them. Ten animals, slaughtered, sacrificed, and burned on the altar for the sins of his ten beloved children, because he’s a man who fears the Lord. He believes in God’s justice and holiness. He knows that if atonement is not made for their sins, God’s judgment will come upon his children. And so, faithfully, every time they gathered together to feast, Job would make atonement for each of them.

The scene then shifts from the land of Uz to God’s heavenly courts in verses 6-12:

**6**Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them.

“The sons of God” is one of the names for angels. These angels are being summoned to present themselves before the LORD as he convenes a heavenly council. But there’s an unexpected participant in this council. Verse 6 says, “Satan also came among them”. There’s some debate about his identity, since the Hebrew literally means “the Satan”, which means “the adversary” or “the accuser”. I don’t see any reason not to associate this being with Satan himself, especially because of what he says to God, and what he does to Job.

**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.”

The Lord turns to Satan in verse 7 and asks, “From where have you come?” God often asks questions in the Bible, not because he lacks knowledge, but in order to draw out the heart of the person being questioned. And the heart of Satan is filled with contempt. “From going to and fro on the earth”, he says, “and from walking up and down on it.” In other words, “It’s none of your business.”

The Lord asks a second question in verse 8:

**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?”

Here the Lord confirms what we already read in verse 1. What the narrator told us, God now tells Satan, word for word. Job is blameless and upright. He fears God, and he turns away from evil. God is showing him off. He wants Satan to look at his servant Job, a man without peer or parallel when it came to reverence and righteousness. There is none like him in the earth. He may have been known as the greatest of all the people of the east, but in God’s eyes, he was the greatest of all the people in the world. And it wasn’t because of what he had, but because of who he was. He was God’s servant.

Satan responds in verses 9-11:

**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.”

Do you hear what Satan is saying? He’s saying to God that the only reason why Job serves God, lives a blameless and upright life, fears God and turns away from evil, is because of what it gets him. Satan’s saying, “Of course he serves you. Look at what you’ve given him! He loves the giver because he loves the gifts. But if you take away the gifts, he’ll hate you. He will curse you to your face.”

Satan isn’t only questioning Job’s integrity. He’s questioning God’s sufficiency. He’s saying to God, “He doesn’t want you. He wants your stuff. No one could love you for your own sake, because you’re not enough. Let me take away his stuff and I’ll prove it to you.”

The Lord replies:

**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.

This is where we begin to understand why Job suffered. He suffered not only so that Job would be vindicated in his integrity, but God would be vindicated in his sufficiency. God lifted the hedge of protection, because Satan couldn’t do anything to Job without God’s permission. Even what he is permitted to do is bound by God’s sovereign rule as he tells him not to stretch his hand against him. But God releases everything else to Job’s adversary, so that God could show the world that there was at least one man in the world who loved him for himself, and not for what he provided.

Derek Kidner writes:

“If Satan can prove God’s finest man a hypocrite, no one’s sincerity will still be credible. But if he fails in this test-case, with every weapon granted him, he will have shown, despite himself, that such a thing as pure disinterested (i.e. not influenced by considerations of personal advantage) godliness indeed exists, beyond all doubt and all concealing.”

We must not forget this, because we might be tempted to believe that Job suffered because he did something wrong, when in reality he suffered because he did everything right. His suffering wasn’t the result of God’s wrath, but God’s delight! This was God’s finest man in all the earth, a man who obeyed God, feared God, and repented of sins against God. But rather than shield him from suffering, it was the very reason why God subjected him to suffering.

God didn’t test Job because he wondered if he would pass. He tested him because he knew that he would. And when Job passed the test, God himself would prove himself to be the highest good, not just to Satan, but to generations of people who came after Job, so that even if we lost everything, we would know that God is enough. God is sufficient for us.

(2) **WHAT JOB SUFFERED**

That’s Job’s initial answer to the question of why he suffered. But it doesn’t answer all our questions. Is it right for God to do that? Do we need to be afraid that if God delights in us then we’ll suddenly lose everything as well? What do we do with the pain of loss? We will address these questions in time, but for now, we must turn our attention to what Job suffered.

**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 servantswith the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you.”

This was a brutal act of terror. These Sabeans didn’t just take some of Job’s animals. They took them all, and they spared no one. These Sabeans were both robbers and murderers, thieves and cutthroats, and with one attack, they took all 500 of his oxen, all 500 of his donkeys, and killed all of his faithful servants who were tending them with the exception of this single messenger.

Job barely has time to process and respond to this when another messenger arrives:

**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.”

Job could have written off the first tragedy as an act of men, but this was undoubtedly an act of God. The fire of God, which was likely a reference to lightning, fell from heaven and burned up all 7000 sheep. This may have been because the fields they were grazing on caught fire, with a burning blaze spreading too quickly for any of the servants to put out or even escape from. Whatever it was, it caused Job to lose his possessions and his servants once again.

But it gets worse:

**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.”

First the oxen and the donkeys, then the sheep, and now the camels. The Chaldeans planned a calculated attack to steal all 3000 camels and slaughter the servants and they executed it perfectly with the exception of this one messenger who survived.

Just like that, the greatest of all the people of the east had become the poorest. Many of you lost income or investments because of the pandemic. Job lost everything. Earlier that day he had owned 11,000 animals. Now he owned none, not because he engaged in a risky venture or was irresponsible with his wealth, but because God had lifted the divine hedge that protected him.

And now for the worst:

**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.”

Ten children dead, not by the Sabeans or the Chaldeans, but by the wind of God. Seven sons and three daughters whom he loved, whom he worried about, whom he interceded for on their behalf, all gone in an instant. No chance to say goodbye. No chance to tell them that he loved them one last time. Not a single one was left to share his grief, to give him purpose, to remind him of God’s blessings. They were all gone, buried under the roof of their oldest brother’s house. The house of feasting had become the house of death.

(3) **HOW JOB SUFFERED**

This was a dark day for Job. It was the darkest day. A man who had everything had lost it all. How would he respond? This leads to our final point.

**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.”

“Then Job arose and tore his robe”. There are times when your feelings inside are so deep and overwhelming that they find physical expression, like when you stomp off angrily, or you throw something, or you punch a wall. Job responds by tearing his robe. He rips it off and tears it apart. Then he shaves his head. He feels the need to change his appearance, to look like one who is destitute and broken, one whose life has fallen apart.

Then he falls on the ground. Why? To cry? To grieve? To give up on life? No. He falls on the ground *to worship*. He falls on the ground to praise God, to acknowledge his greatness, and to submit to his will in worship. How was that possible?

It was possible because of what Job believed:

**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.”

In his moment of deepest pain, it was his doctrine that sustained him. He knew that everything that he had was a gift from God. He didn’t have a right to it. He hadn’t earned any of it. None of it ultimately belonged to him, but to the Lord.

And if the Lord gave, then the Lord could take away. God is the sovereign giver of every good and perfect gift, and it is his prerogative to decide when those gifts should be removed. That’s not an easy truth to accept. It could have made Job curse the Lord to his face as Satan predicted. But he doesn’t do that. He blesses the name of the Lord. He praises him for his goodness, thanks him for the blessings that he had enjoyed, and submits to his wise and loving rule.

Christopher Ash writes,

“In the moment of his loss his first thought is of the God who had first given.”

Chapter 1 ends with verse 22:

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

Job shows us how to suffer well. He didn’t sin by falling into despair, or seeking revenge, or charging God with wrong. Instead, he fell back on what he believed about God: that God is good, that God is sovereign, that God has blessed.

Job believed with all his heart that God was God, and he was not. He was just a man, a man who entered the world naked, and would leave the world naked. He was a man who came into the world with nothing, and would leave the world with nothing. None of that changes the goodness of God, or the blessings that he had given him, because he knows that it is better to have been blessed for a time than to never have been blessed at all.

**CONCLUSION**

Do you believe that? Perhaps you’ve suffered like Job. You’ve followed the Lord, you’ve lived with integrity, your desire has been to honour him in public and in private. And yet you’ve suffered. You’ve lost. You have faced incredible hardship.

You may be tempted to believe that God is punishing you for some unknown sin, or that he’s paying you back for the sins of your youth, or that he’s tired and fed up with how you keep falling short of his standards. But Job tells us a different story. It tells us that those who suffer most can actually be the ones whom God delights in most.

We cannot measure God’s favour by how much we suffer. We cannot let our circumstances dictate whether we believe that God loves us, because we don’t know the whole story. We don’t know what’s taking place in the heavenly councils. We don’t know what Satan is plotting behind the scenes.

But we do know something that Job didn’t. We know what God has said about us, because he has given us his words in Scripture.

And his word tells us that we are forgiven, that our sins are washed away, that there is now no condemnation, not for all, but for all who are in Christ Jesus, because Christ has paid the full penalty for our sins. He suffered and died so that we could be saved. Like Job, Jesus lost everything. But unlike Job, Jesus lost everything *by choice*. He lost his comfort, his friends, his fellowship with the Father out of love for his flock. Job suffered much, but he didn’t choose it. It didn’t redeem anyone from their sins. But Christ chose to lay down his life for us, so that we could have the highest good, the greatest treasure, God himself, forever.

Job lost everything, and yet he was still able to fall on his face and worship. How much more should we? Job went to the grave naked, but we go to the grave clothed in the righteousness of Christ. He lost everything, but we have gained everything because of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

And so, whatever you’re going through, whatever suffering your facing, whatever loss your grieving, whatever burdens you’re carrying, may you say, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”