**WHEN THE RIGHTEOUS SUFFER**

**LOSING MORE AFTER LOSING IT ALL**

**Job 2:1-13**

**INTRODUCTION**

If you’ve ever watched a movie at the Tong household, you’ll know that it’s quite a dynamic experience. Movie night is supposed to be the night when little legs stop running and little mouths stop talking so that Mommy and Daddy can finally put their legs up and relax, but not in the Tong household. In the Tong household, little boys are constantly running up and down the stairs, or hiding in the bathroom, or escaping to play some other game.

It’s not because they’re bored. It’s because they’re scared. They’re scared of all the bad things that are going to happen to the characters on screen. It usually starts with some minor loss or offence, but then it escalates to something bigger or more painful, and they can’t take it. They can’t take the pain that’s being experienced on the screen, so they run. They run away, they cover their ears, and sometimes they shout at the top of their lungs so that they won’t hear what’s going to happen next.

After a while they might drift slowly and cautiously back to the basement and listen carefully to hear if things have gotten better. But other times, I need to go after them and assure them that the worst part is over now. From now on, it’s going to get better.

That’s what we would have expected after Job 1. Job’s suffering began with the loss of his wealth. This man who was the greatest of all the people of the east when it came to wealth and possessions lost all 500 oxen and all 500 donkeys, all 7,000 sheep, and all 3,000 of his camels in a single day. He went from wealth to welfare, from riches to rags, from having everything to owning nothing, from being the greatest to becoming the least. As the readers, we might have thought, “That’s a good place for things to start turning around for him. He’s become the underdog, and he’s going to make it back to the top from scratch.”

But it doesn’t get better. Instead, it gets worse. His ten children – seven sons and three daughters – are all crushed under the weight of their collapsed home, and they’re dead. All ten of them. Dead without a goodbye, dead without a last “I love you”, dead without a single one remaining to comfort him.

At this point we’re just about ready to cover our ears, shout out at the top of our lungs, and run upstairs, but we’re thinking, “Surely, this is when things start turning around. This must be when the light pierces through the darkness, when the redemption story begins to unfold, and when God starts making everything right again.” After all, Job passed the test. God took everything away from him, and yet Job still fell on his face and worshipped. Instead of cursing God like Satan predicted, he blesses God as the Lord predicted.

But as we flip the page to Chapter 2, it doesn’t get better. It gets worse. Life gets even worse for this poor and broken man, because that’s what life can be like for us as well. We get to the point where we don’t think we can take one more drop of pain, one more piece of bad news, one more crushing disappointment, but it comes anyways. When we expect life to start getting better, it gets worse instead, and we think, “Surely, this is enough!” But in God’s mysterious providence, it’s not. We find ourselves being crushed beyond the breaking point with no relief and precious little comfort.

That’s what Job 2 is about, and that’s why I’ve titled this sermon **Losing More After Losing it All.** We will divide this text into three points:

1. Job’s God
2. Job’s Wife
3. Job’s Friends

(1) **JOB’S GOD**

**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.”

Chapter 2 begins with a scene that is nearly identical to what occurred in Chapter 1. God has convened another heavenly council, and Satan comes as well. The Lord asks, “From where have you come?” Satan’s answer is just as dismissive as the first time he was asked. “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.” He doesn’t talk about the mischief he’s been causing. He doesn’t reveal his diabolical schemes. He doesn’t detail all the evil that he has orchestrated to bring Job down to the dust. His answer is vague, irreverent, and dismissive.

The Lord replies in verse 3:

**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?

This is exactly what the Lord said about Job in Chapter 1, but though they are the same words, they carry much greater significance. When God pronounced in Chapter 1 that Job was a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil, Job still had everything. He had all his wealth. His children were all alive and happy. He was the greatest of all the people of the east. Job had not yet been tested with the loss of everything that he valued and loved in this world. But here in Chapter 2, Job is a different man. He is an afflicted man, a grieving man, a man who had been severely tempted to curse God and abandon his Lord. And yet, the Lord confirms that he is still blameless and upright. He is still a man who fears God and turns away from evil.

This is remarkable, because Job didn’t just receive the news of all his loss with a smile. He didn’t just go to his family and friends and say, “Well, I’ll see all my children in heaven.” He tore his robe in anguish. He shaved his head in despair. He lamented the loss of what he had and what he loved. But still, the Lord says that he was blameless and upright, he fears God, and turns away from evil.

Some of us may have the impression that godliness requires a sort of stoicism, the belief that emotions are a sign of weakness. The strong don’t weep or mourn or cry out in pain when they suffer loss. Instead, they weather the storms of life with grim acceptance.

As believers, we can come to believe the same things. We think that someone who really trusts the Lord, or really believes his promises, won’t weep or mourn or cry. We think that being blameless means that you never lose your composure, or being upright means that you never fall on your face, or that fearing God means that you’ll never feel the fear of being alone after your loved one dies. But Job tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell on his face, and God says that even now, he is blameless and upright, he fears God, and he turns away from evil.

Then the Lord adds something he didn’t say in Chapter 1:

**3**… He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason.”

God isn’t ignorant. He hasn’t been deceived by the deceiver. He doesn’t think that Satan actually cares about testing Job. He knows that Satan’s true motivation is to destroy and blot out the godly from this world.

Christopher Ash writes,

“The Satan sets up the test with a logic that has its foundation in the glory of God. But what he actually wants is not to see Job tested but to see Job destroyed.”

But God won’t allow it. He will not let Satan incite him to destroy his faithful servant without reason. He will allow him to be tested, to be afflicted, and to be stretched beyond the breaking point, but he won’t allow him to be destroyed.

Such is the sovereignty and the wisdom of God. God knows all, and God rules over all. He can’t be deceived, manipulated, tempted, or tricked to do anything that is evil or wrong, and even the evil that does happen in our lives is under his restrictions.

We see that happen again in verses 4-6:

**4**Then Satan answered the Lord and said, “Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life.

The meaning of the first phrase is a little ambiguous, but it seems to mean that people are willing to give up the skin of others in order to save their own. That appears to be why Satan says, “All that a man has he will give for his life.” It’s a cynical view of human nature that is no doubt twisted by Satan’s own self-centered personality, and it’s obviously not always true. Parents know that they would rather give up their comfort than see their children suffer, or even lay down their lives so that their children may live. But whether it’s true or not, Satan has put forward a theory of human nature that needs to be tested if Job’s integrity, and God’s sufficiency, are to be vindicated.

And so, Satan says:

**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.”

Once again, God has allowed Satan to afflict Job, not because he deserved it, or needed it, or earned it, but because God wants to show the world that Job doesn’t love him for his gifts. He loves him for himself. Even if Job lost everything, including his health, he would worship the Lord, because God is good, and God is enough.

Satan is released once again to afflict God’s finest man, and this time, he has only one restriction: “only spare his life”. Job’s body may be in the hands of the devil, but his life is not. Satan can only operate within the boundaries that God has set.

(2) **JOB’S WIFE**

Now the scene shifts from heaven back to earth and to an unexpected conversation with Job’s wife, which leads to our second point.

In Chapter 1, Satan’s activity is hidden behind the agency of raiding parties and natural disasters. Satan isn’t mentioned as the one who stole Job’s animals or killed his children. It was the Sabeans and the Chaldeans, as well as the fire and wind of God. But here in verse 7, it is made absolutely clear that Satan is the one afflicting him.

Verse 7 says,

**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.

These “loathsome sores” are literally “evil boils”. They were swollen areas of skin filled with pus that covered him from head to foot. Not a single area of his body was free from this pain. Not a single patch of skin gave him relief from this unceasing agony.

Job’s pain is so severe that verse 8 says,

**8**And he took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes.

That was his only form of relief. He didn’t have medicine, either because he couldn’t afford it or because there was no medical cure for it at the time. He didn’t have gels or creams or bandages to slather on these gaping wounds. All he had was a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself. He would burst the boils full of pus for some temporary relief, only for new ones to grow in their place.

It’s hard to imagine how Job felt, but verse 8 gives us an idea. It says that he “sat in the ashes”, the place where people took their garbage and waste to burn. He went to the town dump because that’s how he felt – like garbage – discarded and unwanted by all because of how ugly and destitute he had become.

Then he is tempted by an unexpected source. Verse 9:

**9**Then his wife said to him, “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die.”

I’ve often said that if my wife and I are united, we can handle anything. We can take on the world as long as we’re by each other’s side. But when we’re not, we become fragile, weak, and easily tempted.

That was the case for Job. Verse 9 reveals that Job’s wife has been going through her own struggles. She has lot their family wealth as well. She has lot all ten of her beloved children. And now, in the moment of her deepest grief, she tempts Job to sin. “Give up your integrity, Job! Stop pretending that God is with us and for us. Stop trying to bless God and hold on to life. Just curse God and die.”

Does that sound familiar? It was Satan who said that after Job lost everything, after God stretched out his hand and touched his bone and his flesh, that he would curse God to his face. Now it’s Job’s wife telling him to do just that. “Curse God and die”, she says. Satan may have gone silent, but he’s speaking to Job through his wife, not because he’s possessing her, but because he’s tempting her and making her belief that God is evil, God is cruel, God isn’t worthy of our worship.

There are times when our greatest temptations come from people whom we would least expect. They come from the people who love us, care for us, and want what’s best for us. Think of Sarah tempting Abraham with Hagar. Think of the wives of Solomon who tempted him to worship idols. Think of Peter tempting Jesus with the thought that he didn’t have to die, and Jesus’ rebuke, “Get behind me, Satan!”

Job’s rebuke is more tender, perhaps because he knew that his wife wasn’t speaking from a place of strength, but of weakness:

**10**But he said to her, “You speak as one of the foolish women would speak.”

Job doesn’t call her a foolish woman. He says that she’s speaking as a foolish woman would speak. He creates separation between who he knows his wife to be – a woman of faith and wisdom who fears the Lord – and who she’s resembling in that moment.

Job wasn’t a man who would judge his wife based on her lowest moment. As harsh as her comment was, he was willing to overlook it and remind her that these aren’t the kinds of things they say. They don’t speak like those who are foolish, who don’t fear the Lord, who don’t believe in his sovereign goodness.

Instead, they are those who say,

“Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?”

Job is saying again what he said in Chapter 1. “Shall not the Lord give, and not take away? Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?” Job is calling his wife to trust in the sovereign goodness of God, to believe that the same God who has afflicted them was the same God who had blessed them. And if the Lord knew what he was doing in blessing them, he knows what he’s doing now in afflicting them.

Verse 10 ends with,

“In all this Job did not sin with his lips.”

Job didn’t sin by cursing God. Nor did he sin by tracing the evil in his life ultimately back to God. God doesn’t say, “Wait a minute, I didn’t do this to you. Satan did it. Don’t blame me.” He says, “You’re right, Job. It was I who ordained this evil for you, and you have not sinned by saying so.”

After all these temptations and trials, and in the midst of the physical agony of his bodily affliction, Job remains blameless and upright, fearing God and turning away from evil.

(3) **JOB’S FRIENDS**

Lastly, Job’s friends.

**11**Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that had come upon him, they came each from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They made an appointment together to come to show him sympathy and comfort him.

At this point, verse 11 introduces us to three of the main characters in the book of Job. The conversation between Job and these three men will take up 28 of the 42 chapters in this book. There’s Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. These three men are friends of Job, and as friends, they make plans to come to him together to “show him sympathy and comfort him.”

The word “comfort” here is used in the Old Testament to refer to speech that changes the mind and heart of the sufferer. It’s the provision of perspective, or the assurance that everything’s going to be alright, or the reminder of divine truths that make sense of one’s suffering.

They came with a plan to speak to their friend, but verse 12 says,

**12**And when they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him. And they raised their voices and wept, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads toward heaven.

They didn’t recognize him. His skin was so infested with boils, his face was so distorted, that they couldn’t believe that this was their friend. This was the greatest of all the people of the east sitting on an ash heap and scraping himself with a broken piece of pottery.

And so, rather than comfort him, they weep – not with him, because it seems that he’s all done weeping, but for him – and “they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads toward heaven.”

**13**And they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.

This is the wisdom of Ecclesiastes 3:7

“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven… a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.”

There are times when a friend’s suffering is so great, that the best thing we can do is sit with them, hold them, and cry with them. But it’s questionable whether even that made a difference. There’s actually nothing in the text that says that their presence comforted him at all.

Shortly after his wife died of cancer, C.S. Lewis wrote about this in *A Grief Observed*:

“I see people, as they approach me, trying to make up their minds whether they'll 'say something about it' or not. I hate if they do, and if they don't.” – C.S. Lewis

There is very little comfort to be had when someone suffers like Job. It doesn’t matter if people speak or remain silent. Job’s friends probably did the right thing here, at least at the beginning. But as the days and nights stretched on – seven days and seven nights – so did their silence, to the point that we might wonder, “Was it right for them to not say a single thing the entire time?”

I believe that the answer to this question is found in what they end up saying in Chapters 4-31, where they finally take the time to tell Job what’s on their minds. As we’ll see, it wasn’t good. It wasn’t comforting. It was accusatory, condemning, and harsh.

Christopher Ash writes,

“Their silence may be not so much a silence of sympathy (although it may have begun as such) but a silence of bankruptcy. They say nothing because they have nothing to say that will bring him comfort.” – Christopher Ash

They had nothing to say because they didn’t understand. They didn’t know what it was like for life to get worse, and worse, and worse; to lose more after losing it all. They didn’t know what it was like for Job to live his whole life in reverent submission to the Lord, holding fast to his integrity, only to have his whole world come crumbling down around him.

**CONCLUSION**

Only one man could know what that felt like. Only one man could know what it felt like to lose his family, his community, his reputation, and his friends. Like Job, Jesus lost it all, and then he lost more. But unlike Job, God didn’t say, “Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life.” He God didn’t leave a partial hedge of protection to guard the life of his beloved Son. He gave him up completely to the hands of evil men and to the cruel will of the devil to crucify on a Roman cross and die.

And on that cross, Jesus lost it all. He felt his life slowly drip out of his nail pierced hands and feet. He felt his lungs strain under the exhaustion of strangled breath. And worst of all, he felt the agony of losing the blessed fellowship and presence of his Heavenly Father. His pain was so great that he cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” And all he received from heaven was silence.

Jesus lost more after losing it all, not because Satan triumphed, not because evil men had their way, but because God willed it. And he willed it so that all who trust in him could be saved. Jesus suffered and died in our place for our sins, so that we might be reconciled to God. He lost it all, so that we might gain it all – the gain of everlasting life and fellowship with God.

Jesus is a friend of sinners, and Jesus is a friend of sufferers. He is a friend of sinners because he died for us, and he is a friend of sufferers because he suffered with us. He understands what it’s like. He sympathizes with you in your weakness. He doesn’t approach you with the silence of bankruptcy. He comes to you with the silence of sympathy. He knows when to comfort you with his presence, and he knows when to speak to you the words of eternal life.

Whether you’ve suffered little, or whether you’ve suffered much; whether you’ve walked with Jesus for decades or you’re just beginning to trust him; whether life is full of feasting, or life is full of mourning; know that you can come to Jesus.

He will sit with you, grieve with you, and comfort you. And he will lift you up out of the ash heap and seat you at God’s right hand in the heavenly places, and he will restore everything that you have lost and suffered through the power of his resurrection.

If you belong to Jesus, your story won’t get worse and worse. It will have a happy ending in God’s presence beholding God’s glory with God’s people. So come to Jesus, bring him your suffering, and he will bring you to himself.