

The Book of Job:
A Window into a World
of Suffering and Faith, #5

A Sufferer's Protest
Job 6-27

--CEFC 2/11/18

So, it's been two weeks since we last looked at Job—
and let me remind you that while we have been learning about
discovering God's good will from Pastor Tim
and enjoying a very entertaining Superbowl,
Job hasn't moved.

He is still there—right where we left him
in a state of mourning,
sitting on the ash heap,
grieving his wretched condition.

Listen to the way he describes his miserable state--

**"My body is clothed with worms and scabs,
my skin is broken and festering" (7:5).**

**"My face is red with weeping,
deep shadows ring my eyes;" (16:16).**

**"God has made me a byword to everyone,
a man in whose face people spit.**

**My eyes have grown dim with grief;
my whole frame is but a shadow" (17:6-7).**

Can you picture that?

Poor Job!

What a pathetic sight he is!
He is trapped in the depths of a deep, deep pit of despair—
He is in the grip of intense grief,
and for good reason:

Everything that he valued—
his property,
his position in society,
his entire family,
his health,
even the loyalty of his wife—
it had all been taken from him.
And his God was nowhere to be found.

Job has three friends who had come from some distance to console him,
and they had attempted to rescue him from his state of mourning.
They wanted to return Job to the land of the living.

They began well enough,
sitting with poor Job on the ash heap in silence for a full week.

Job had initially responded to his disaster with a submissive and most pious faith,
but when he first gave voice to the deep pain in his heart,

cursing the day of his birth,
 and in the process insinuating that God was treating him unjustly,
 his friends could remain silent no longer.
 They could not let that kind of talk go unchallenged.
 They initiated three cycles of interchanges in which they each had go at Job
 attempting to get him to come to his senses.

You see, as we have observed,
 Job's friends believed that they held the keys of wisdom—
 They were the heirs of the wisdom of their ancestors,
 the wisdom that came from observing human society.
 And this wisdom gave them a confidence
 that they understood the way God acted in the world.

Certainly, they believed that God was sovereign—
 that nothing happens except through him and by his will
 even if that will comes in the form of his permission.

More specifically, they believed in a strict view of God's retributive justice,
 which quite simply states that God will see to it
 that people get what they deserve.
 How could he do otherwise and still be just?

If you fear God, you will be blessed,
 and if you sin, you will suffer.

And in their minds, this principle can easily be turned around—
 If you are blessed, it must be because you have feared God,
 and if you suffer, it must be because you have sinned.

This must be true, because God is just—
 and that's just the way he has ordered his world.
 And the wise recognize this and live accordingly.

They begin by politely urging Job to consider this truth and to respond appropriately—
 Job must acknowledge his sin before God
 in order to be restored to him.

By the end, as this dialogue turns into a debate and then into a savage denunciation,
 they explicitly accuse Job of whole host of moral transgressions (22:6-11).

In his last address to Job, Eliphaz lays it on thick—

22:4 "Is it for your piety that [God] rebukes you
 and brings charges against you?"

5 Is not your wickedness great?

Are not your sins endless? . . .

10 That is why snares are all around you,
 why sudden peril terrifies you,

11 why it is so dark you cannot see,
 and why a flood of water covers you."

You have sinned, Job, just admit it,
 and then you can again enjoy God's blessing./

And behind this question is an ever deeper one—
Is God really worthy of worship for his own sake
and not just for the good things he gives us?
Is God really worthy of all praise, honor and glory?

That question is at the center of this book—
The honor of Almighty God himself is at stake
in the behavior of this one man Job./

So how does Job do?
How does he respond to the horrible calamity that has come upon him?
Can he really persevere in faith?

It is critical to our understanding of the book
to appreciate that Job, just as much as his friends,
believed both in God's sovereign rule
and in the principle of retributive justice.
Job believed that God is just—
and that he gives people what they deserve—
that he blesses the righteous and punishes the wicked.

Job's friends conclude that since God is just
Job must have sinned.
But Job knows, and we the readers of this book know,
that Job hasn't sinned—
or at least he hadn't sinned to the degree
that merited the treatment he had received.
Job's sin is not the reason for Job's suffering.

So how is Job going to deal with his dreadful condition?
How was this going to affect his relationship with God?

In light of the awful suffering that God has afflicted upon him,
how could Job hold on to the notion that God is still good,
while at the same time, insisting that he himself was innocent.

You have to feel this tension.
He feels trapped in this insoluble predicament.

So how does Job respond?
Before we address that question
I want us to consider how he doesn't respond—
What are ways that he might taken to escape this trap, but doesn't.

The first is what the friends urge Job to do—
to acknowledge God's justice by admitting his own sin.
If Job would simply repent and turn to God,
the Lord would restore to him his former prosperity.

Eliphaz says, "**If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored:
If you remove wickedness far from your tent**" (22:23).

But Job refuses to take this road.

Job refuses to repent because any such repentance would be false.

He was innocent,

and to deny that innocence would be to forfeit his own integrity.

To his friends he says,

**"I will never admit you are in the right;
till I die, I will not deny my integrity.**

**I will maintain my innocence and never let go of it;
my conscience will not reproach me as long as I live"** (27:5-6 [NIV11]).

To engage in some pious religious ritual

with a pretence of repentance would simply be a way of
manipulating God for personal gain.

That course would have proved the cynical Satan to be right,
and Job will not do it.

Second, Job does not do what Satan was sure he would do--

Job does not curse God.

Job does say some pretty harsh things about the way God is treating him.

6: 4—"The arrows of the Almighty are in me,
my spirit drinks in their poison;
God's terrors are marshaled against me."

16:12 "All was well with me, but he shattered me;
he seized me by the neck and crushed me.

He has made me his target;

13 his archers surround me.

Without pity, he pierces my kidneys
and spills my gall on the ground.

14 Again and again he bursts upon me;
he rushes at me like a warrior."

He is "multiplying my wounds for no reason" (Job 9:17).

19:11 "His anger burns against me;
he counts me among his enemies.

12 His troops advance in force;
they build a siege ramp against me
and encamp around my tent."

"Does it please you to oppress me," he asks God,
 "to spurn the work of your hands,
 while you smile on the schemes of the wicked?" (Job 10:3).

13:21 "Withdraw your hand far from me,
 and stop frightening me with your terrors.

24 Why do you hide your face
 and consider me your enemy?"

23:16—"God has made my heart faint;
 the Almighty has terrified me."

Some hear these words and want to condemn Job for his brazen impiety—
 You can't speak of God like this!

Job even declares that [God] "**has denied me justice,
 the Almighty, . . . has made me taste bitterness of soul**" (27:2).

But you have to understand,
 this is the way Job feels—
 this is the way God's actions toward him appear.
 And we know that Job is right to feel this way—
 God has afflicted him for no reason—
 God himself has admitted that in chap. 2 (2:3).

But Job doesn't give in to those feelings;
 he struggles with what he is experiencing.
 It's true—sometimes he wants God to leave him alone—
 But there is a certain irony in that
 he keeps coming back to God when he does it.

He continues to pray.
 He doesn't give in to his bitter feelings and curse God
 precisely because of his faith—
 He knows that what he is experiencing from God
 is not a true reflection of who he knows God to be.

Job refuses to deny God's fundamental goodness, God's justice.
 That is what is causing him so much distress—
 the fact that the God he knows to be good and just
 appears to be treating him in a way that seems to Job so unjust.

His emotional struggle, at least as it related to God, could be over
 if he simply quit expecting God to act justly
 and reckoned him to be some evil force.
 That's what his wife urged him to do.

But Job won't go there—
 he refuses to curse God.

Third, though Job curses the day of his own birth
and wishes that he had died when he came from the womb,
he never contemplates suicide.

Death seems to him as a possible welcome relief from the intense pain he is experiencing.

And he seems to welcome the thought that God might take his life.

6:8 "Oh, that I might have my request,
that God would grant what I hope for,
9 that God would be willing to crush me,
to let loose his hand and cut me off!
10 Then I would still have this consolation—
my joy in unrelenting pain—
that I had not denied the words of the Holy One."

God may kill him,
but Job never considers taking his own life./

I can remember a time in my own life when I came close to doing just that—
The pain I experienced was excruciating.

I entered the emergency room doubled over,
and the nurse instantly recognized the symptoms—it was kidney stones.
She immediately put me on a morphine drip,
but my heart rate dropped to a dangerous level,
and I remember urging her to just give me more morphine
regardless of the consequences—
I didn't care—I knew where I was going—so just give me more morphine!

It was not quite suicide,
but it was still a desperate and perhaps reckless attempt to escape the pain!

But Job never contemplates such an escape.
Suicide was never an option.

In that sense, Job refuses to give up on his own life and to give in to his despair,
for that would be giving up all hope in God.
Job perseveres even through the pain of his own living hell.

And finally, throughout the course of the book,
despite his horrible suffering and intense pain,
Job never abandons God.
He never gives up his desire to hear from God,
to meet with God,
and to be vindicated by God.

Though Job is arguing with his friends,

his real audience throughout this dispute is God.¹
He continues to seek him, to confront him, to pray to him.
It is very clear throughout the book
that Job's deepest longing is not the restoration of his prosperity
but the restoration of his relationship with God./

It is all too easy in the midst of deep pain and trauma
to turn away from God with a feeling of betrayal and abandonment
and never seek to reestablish a connection.
I've seen Christian believers in times of suffering
turn away from contact with the church,
and in their pain, withdraw from Christian worship and prayer.
Job doesn't do that.
To the end he is wrestling with God.

So Job doesn't seek an easy way out.
He refuses to do what many of us would be tempted to do
if we were in his shoes—
He doesn't engage in false repentance—
participating is some religious pretence, a superficial piety,
as a way of seeking God's blessing.
Job refuses to curse God--
thereby denying God's goodness.
Job never contemplates suicide—
giving up on his own life and dying in despair.
And to the end, Job never turns his back on God,
abandoning him once and for all.

This is what Job **doesn't** do.
But now let's turn to what Job **does** do.

Certainly Job directly disputes his friends' simplistic notions of retributive justice.
Job asserts that it is simply not true that the righteous are always blessed
and the wicked always suffer.

In chap. 21, he asks,
**"Why do the wicked live on,
growing old and increasing in power?
They see their children established around them,
their offspring before their eyes.
Their homes are safe and free from fear;
the rod of God is not upon them"** (21:7-9).

"Have you never questioned those who travel?" he asks.
You need to look again at the world around you—

¹Frequently his words after each of his friends' speeches has this pattern—first, Job responds to the friend, then he turns to address God.

The Bible has a whole book of lament—
a book we call *Lamentations*.

A lament is simply a way of venting one's feelings—
it is a cry of real pain.
And the Bible seems to endorse that practice.

But biblical laments have a special character--
they are voiced in the presence of God.

In that sense biblical laments become a form of prayer—
there is always an implicit plea for God to act,
to rescue the speaker from his painful condition.

This is a fallen world—
a world in which we will all suffer,
and the biblical laments encourage us to be honest
about the pain we experience
and not pretend it doesn't hurt.
Pain hurts—by definition.

The Bible urges us to bring our grieving, our sorrows, our suffering before God.
Job certainly does.

But there is another aspect of lament—
It is found in the Psalms, in the prophets, and very much in Job,
and that is complaint.

In Psalm 13, David asks,
**"How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and every day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?"** (Ps. 13:1-2).

"Lord, I am hurting here—
how long must I endure this?
How long before you act in your love and mercy to relieve my pain?
How long until you act in your justice to right what is wrong in this fallen world?"

This is a question that we hear even in heaven itself—
In the Revelation of John, he saw
**"under the altar the souls of the martyrs who called out in a loud voice,
"How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true,
until you judge the inhabitants of the earth
and avenge our blood?"** (Rev. 6:9-10).

So Job's lament includes a complaint against God—
he says as much—
He says in 7:11—**"Therefore I will not keep silent;
I will speak out in the anguish of my spirit,**

I will complain in the bitterness of my soul."

And again in 10:1--"**I will give free rein to my complaint
and speak out in the bitterness of my soul."**

Job laments his condition before God,
and he complains about it to God.

But I think it is fair to say that Job's words go beyond complaint
to real **protest**.

Job firmly believes that he is being treated unfairly by God—
and he wants God to know it.

**10:2-- "I will say to God: Do not condemn me,
but tell me what charges you have against me.
3 Does it please you to oppress me,
to spurn the work of your hands,
while you smile on the schemes of the wicked?"**

As we said, Job feels that God is treating him as an enemy,
and he doesn't like it.

It's not right.
He objects.

In his lamentation,
Job also protests the way he was being treated.

Is Job being unfaithful is speaking this way?
Isn't he like the Israelites in the desert after their exodus from Egypt
who grumbled about their lack of food and water,
and were rebuked by God and punished for it?²

I don't think so.

For one thing, unlike Job,
the Israelites directed their protests against Moses and Aaron
and not to God himself.³

And then, their grumbling was not grounded in faith in God's goodness
but assumed that God himself was wicked--

Moses says to them—

**"You grumbled in your tents and said,
"The LORD hates us;
so he brought us out of Egypt
to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us" (Deut. 1:27).**

²See Num. 14:27-30 and 1 Cor. 10:10.

³Cf. e.g., Ex. 16:2, though God understood that ultimately he was object of their protest (e.g., Ex. 16:7).

In contrast, Job's protest is grounded in his conviction that God is just—
Job is struggling to make sense of the world around him
in the light of what he knows to be true about God.

He is not trying to run away from God
so much as run toward him—
he wants to confront him,
to hear from him,
to be restored to him.

The Israelites in the desert were rebelling against God;
Job is simply in conflict with him—
It's a conflict between his faith and his experience—
between who he knows God to be
and the way he is now being treated.
His is a "faithful revolt,"
a "pious protest,"
a "believing belligerence."

I think Job is a model of faith for us
simply because in his lament he is not afraid to lay out his own inner struggles
before the only one who can alleviate his suffering,
heal his wounds
and dry his tears.⁴

Which leads to one other way to describe Job's reaction--
and that is, litigation.
Job wants this conflict between himself and God resolved—
and in his mind, there is only one way to do it.
It's the same way that people often seek to resolve conflict in our culture.
Job wants to take God to court.

His speeches are shot through with legal language,
as Job wants to take up a lawsuit against God in his effort to secure vindication.

In chap. 9 Job begins to wonder what it might mean to meet with God in court—
**"How then can I dispute with him?
How can I find words to argue with him?
Though I were innocent, I could not answer him;
I could only plead with my Judge for mercy" (9:14-15).**

In chapter 10 he explores what he might say to God--
**Job 10:2—"I will say to God: Do not condemn me,
but tell me what charges you have against me."
What have I done to deserve such treatment at your hands?**

The litigation theme continues in chap. 13--

⁴Cf. Westermann, cited in Wilson, p. 251.

- "I desire to speak to the Almighty
and to argue my case with God" (13:3).
- 18 "Now that I have prepared my case,
I know I will be vindicated.
19 Can anyone bring charges against me?
If so, I will be silent and die.
20 Only grant me these two things, O God,
and then I will not hide from you:
21 Withdraw your hand far from me,
and stop frightening me with your terrors.
22 Then summon me and I will answer,
or let me speak, and you reply.
23 How many wrongs and sins have I committed?
Show me my offense and my sin" (13:18-23).

But Job knows that such a meeting with God seems beyond his means—

And in a parody of the words of Psalm 139, Job says,

- 23:8 "But if I go to the east, he is not there;
if I go to the west, I do not find him.
9 When he is at work in the north, I do not see him;
when he turns to the south, I catch no glimpse of him."

- 23:3 –"If only I knew where to find him;
if only I could go to his dwelling!
4 I would state my case before him
and fill my mouth with arguments.
5 I would find out what he would answer me,
and consider what he would say.
6 Would he oppose me with great power?
No, he would not press charges against me.
7 There an upright man could present his case before him,
and I would be delivered forever from my judge."

Job, in his agony of mind and body, is imagining all options.

But he wonders if he really does want to stand before Almighty God—

He knows the power of God--

- 9:2--"how can a mortal be righteous before God?
3 Though one wished to dispute with him,
he could not answer him one time out of a thousand.
4 His wisdom is profound, his power is vast.
Who has resisted him and come out unscathed?
5 He moves mountains without their knowing it
and overturns them in his anger."

- 9:14 "How then can I dispute with him?"

**How can I find words to argue with him?
19 If it is a matter of strength, he is mighty!
And if it is a matter of justice, who will summon him?"**

Again, Job is confident of his own righteousness,
but he is frightened of the prospect of appearing before God—
23:11 –"My feet have closely followed his steps;
I have kept to his way without turning aside.
12 I have not departed from the commands of his lips;
I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread."
13 "But he stands alone, and who can oppose him?
He does whatever he pleases.
14 He carries out his decree against me,
and many such plans he still has in store.
15 That is why I am terrified before him;
when I think of all this, I fear him.
16 God has made my heart faint;
the Almighty has terrified me."

And here we come to one of the most intriguing aspects of Job's response.

He wants to meet with God,
but at the same time he is terrified by the prospect.

And in several places Job seems to toy with the thought of some mediator
who could stand with him—
some legal advocate who could state his case,
some witness who could testify on his behalf—
even a redeemer who would make his claim before God.

We first see this in chap. 9—

9:32 "He [that is, God] is not a man like me that I might answer him,
that we might confront each other in court.
33 If only there were someone to arbitrate between us,
to lay his hand upon us both,
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."

"If only,"
"If only"—

Then in chap. 16 he imagines a similar figure,
this time called his "witness" and his "advocate"—
a "friend" who will intercede for him.

16:19—"Even now my witness is in heaven;

20 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 a man pleads for his friend."

And finally, and most famously, in chap. 19--

19:25—"I know that my Redeemer lives,
 and that in the end he will stand upon 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!"

Many of you will immediately recognize the first line of this passage—

 "I know that my Redeemer lives"
 as a line from Handel's *Messiah*.

And perhaps because of that,
 you immediately conclude that this is the high point of Job's faith—
 He now understands that a Messiah is coming
 and that he will be raised with him and experience a full redemption.

I can't quite go there.

 For one thing, if matters were that clear to Job,
 then why does he return to his despairing mood
 for another twelve chapters,
 never again referring to this glorious revelation?

And elsewhere in the book he shows no awareness of life after death—
 He refers to death as "**the journey of no return**" (16:22; cf. 14:10-12).

No, I think Job is still wrestling with the deepest question of all—
 In our pain and suffering our deepest need is to face God,
 but how is that possible?
 In his agony, Job feels that God is bearing down on him
 but at the same time only God can rescue him.
 How can God, who is so terrifying in his power,
 so overwhelming in his holiness,
 so vast in his knowledge,
 how can such a God ever relate
 to such an insignificant, weak and ignorant human being like me?

"If only there were someone to arbitrate between us,
 to lay his hand upon us both,
 someone to remove God's rod from me,
 so that his terror would frighten me no more.
 Then I would speak up without fear of him,

but as it now stands with me, I cannot" (9:32-35).

If only there was a witness, an advocate, a mediator.

There must be a redeemer who will stand for me.

But Job is at a loss to know who this could be—

"It is God who is against me," he thinks,

"but only God can rescue me."

Do you see Job's dilemma here?—

as he wrestles with the suffering he is enduring,

in Job's mind, God seems to be the problem,

but he also knows that only God can be the solution.

How can this be?

God seems to be against him,

but only if God is for him can he be restored. /

And as those on this side of the coming of Jesus Christ into the world,

we can now see that what Job longed for,

what he imagined as his only hope,

has in fact come to pass.

We do have that witness, that advocate, that redeemer—

that one who stands both on the side of God and on our side—

one who is able to mediate, to reconcile, to arbitrate between us.

We now know of that one who is both an expression of the love of God

even as he in his death appeases the wrath of God—

someone who "**removes God's rod from me,**

so that his terror would frighten me no more."

Job, in his deep pain, sees the problem,

and Job, in his deep longing, points us to the only solution—

the solution found in the gospel of the triune God.

God in his grace provides his own Son

as our mediator, our advocate, and our redeemer.

In Christ, God in his love for us

satisfies his own wrath against us,

and he receives us as his own children.

For as Paul says it—

"God demonstrates his own love for in this:

while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rm. 5:8).

In Job's darkness, we get a glimpse of glorious gospel light.

And we will see that the ultimate "answer"

to the problem of evil and suffering in this world

is found in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. /

But Job is still on his ash heap, in grief and mourning,
lamenting his condition,

complaining, even protesting his treatment.
And he is not done yet.

But as we close I want to direct your attention
to someone that Jesus points us to who is a lot like Job—
it's woman who felt she was being treated unjustly.
It is sometimes called the parable of the unjust judge—
but the unjust judge's role in the parable is just as a foil, a contrast,
to the true Judge who always judges justly.

The real focus of the parable is the woman—
it's more accurately named the parable of the importunate widow.

She refused to give up--
when things look grim and even hopeless
she refused to give up;
she kept coming, she kept asking, pleading, imploring—
even to the point of being irritating

Here Jesus assumes that in the face of the evils of this world
we will feel unjustly treated—
and we must be those who persevere in a persistent faith—
and engage in what might be called protesting prayer—
prayer of the sort Job prayed.

And concludes—
**“When the Son of Man comes,
will he find faith on the earth?”**

Will there be those who refused to give up and to give in?
Will there be those who persevered in faith--
despite the pain and the hardship
and the injustice and the apparent unfairness of life in this world?

**“Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them
that they should always pray and not give up.”**

May Job be an encouragement to us this morning to persevere to the end.

Prayer—

Jesus is—
our mediator, our advocate, our witness, our redeemer

Closing Song: *He Will Hold Me Fast* #382—*Be Thou My Vision*

Benediction:

2Tim. 4:18 May the Lord will rescue you from every evil attack
and bring you safely to his heavenly kingdom.
To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

**The Book of Job:
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of Suffering and Faith, #5
Feb. 11, 2018**

A Sufferer's Protest Job 6-27

From the accusations of Job's "friends" we now turn to Job's own defense. In the depths of his pain, he will neither deny his innocence nor curse God. The resulting struggle leaves him lamenting his condition and calling on God to make himself known and to vindicate his suffering servant.

I. Ways Job Doesn't Respond: (ways of escaping from the situation)

- A. False Repentance—
Deny His Own Innocence
[he refuses—27:5; 13:15]**
- B. Cursing God—
Deny God's Goodness**
- C. Suicide—
Give Up on His Own Life**
- D. Abandoning God—
Give Up on God**

II. Ways Job Does Respond: (Job doesn't give up—he perseveres)

- A. Lament**
 - 1. Grieving Before God**
 - 2. Complaining to God**
 - 3. Protesting against God**

B Litigation

**Longing to Meet God
Only God can make things right.**

The Desire for a Mediator?

Sermon Discussion:

**A Sufferer's Protest
Job 6-27**

- In times of suffering and trial, which of these options would you be most tempted to follow?--
 - 1) a superficial religious piety
 - 2) an anger toward God and a denial of God's goodness
 - 3) a suicidal despair in your condition
 - 4) an abandonment of God

- Why do you think laments are so common in the Bible? How can lament be a helpful response to suffering?

- Has Job gone too far in the way he addresses God? Why or why not?

- What do you make of the idea that ultimately the problem of suffering and evil in the world goes back to God and that therefore only God can solve it?

- Read Job 9:32-35 (also 16:19-21; 19:25-27). How does that point us to the gospel?

- Read the parable of the importunate widow (Luke 18:1-8). How does this relate to the story of Job?

- Pray for persevering faith.