

Sunday, August 21, 2016

Job 1:1-3, 7:11, 20-22 and 2:4-11

Job 19:21-27

Job 42:1-6, 10-17

### Job's Story of Faith

We continue to look at different stories and topics as you selected for the summer. Today's focus is on Job which is the story from the Old Testament which involves a full length argument about whether the misfortunes that befall generally good people come to them from the hand of God. (1) Job's story is filled with theological questions which cause people to sit and reflect and wonder today for as people question their faith they are like Job and wonder if God is to be feared or loved or even this is possible at the same time.

Rabbi Harold Kushner wrote, "When bad things happen to Good people in 1981" and was asked to respond to Job's situation in 2010. Published in 2012 Kushner's book, "The book of Job: When bad things Happened to a Good Person" offers incites to those questioning their faith about God, and whether he is real or if he controls our world.

We are reminded that the book of Job is found in the third part of the Old Testament. After the Torah which are the first 5 books of the Law and after the prophets who would foresee the need of a messiah. Job is placed along with the books of truth that include the spiritual Psalms and the practical Proverbs. Job fits into this because it contains both a fable or story and poetry. (2)

The passages from Job 1, 2 and 42 comprise the fable or story of Job which includes unfathomable suffering for one person to endure and a happy ending. Chapters 3-41 provide extensive poetic arguments between Job and his friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar and God. It is in these poetic sections where theological arguments about God being just is questioned and discussed with only vague conclusions being drawn and for which each argument needs much time and attention. Today I hope to present Job's story as more than a person who started off with a lot, lost everything and regained it all. For Job's story is probably closer to many of us today than we realize it. For today, we often question God's role in what occurs in the world and even where God is as we strive to live each day faithfully following his commandments of the OT and of Christ's teachings to love in the NT.

Job is a man who feared God, was blameless and upright. He was wealthy with many sheep and cattle and had a large family. He lacked nothing and it seemed his world was complete. He did not sin but often made sacrifices for the sake of others who might have gotten carried away in their actions. Job feared God because he had an innate sense of morality, a feeling of honour at the prospect of doing something evil. He did not wish to have to face the circumstances of punishment. He was truly a pious God fearing man who lived a good life. Even though we are not told of his 'religious' affiliation- whether Jewish or Israelite, he lived loving God and did what he believed was right each day. (3)

In the fable, Satan appears before God and he gives a report on the doings of God's earthly subjects. In this we might ask whether Satan acts as a spy for God for it is then God says have you seen Job? God insists that Job would be just as faithful even if all the blessings he had received were taken from him. So God and Satan enter a wager using Job. Job loses everything- sheep, cattle, servants are killed, a tornado destroys his house and all the children are killed too. Yet as we read in 1:22 "despite all that, Job did not sin nor did he cast reproach on God." Or as another translation states, "Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing." (4)

Many people wonder why God put Job to the test. God knew his heart and his life. God knew him. Why did God allow himself to be talked into hurting one of his most faithful creatures? But we must remember that Job was not the only one who was tested. Remember Abraham (Genesis 22) God tested him by having him take his son Isaac to make an offering to him. An angel intervenes and provides an animal to sacrifice just as Abraham is ready to kill his son as a sacrifice. This demand to sacrifice Isaac is a test and the reward for Abraham is the promise of many descendants just as the reward to Job is the blessing of more children. However, the difference is that Isaac is not killed, whereas Job's family are all killed. (5)

Satan again tests God and uses Job. Job's property is gone but if he is to truly be tested, God needed to inflict diseases upon him. That is why Job was afflicted with disease and he was in much pain. Job's wife sees how much he is now suffering physically, and so she encourages Job to curse God so that he would be put out of his misery. Job questions her, "Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?"

There is a story of a young woman who comes to know Christ and is just overwhelmed by the joy God has given to her and her family. She is a new person in Christ and is growing spiritually. However, not everything was taught to her about living a Christian life. She continued to grow in faith but when a loved one closer to her died, she went to her minister and cried, why did my friend die? I thought that I was receiving eternal life which is a good thing. I am so saddened by my friend's death I don't know what to do. I thought and hoped that once I followed God's ways- life would be free from death, suffering hurt and pain. I'm still experiencing those things. The minister calmly replied, life is filled with death, suffering, hurt and pain but now you face all of life's challenges knowing that Jesus is with you step by step and moment by moment. This is how you grow in faith and come to understand life more fully in Jesus. And you face whatever comes your way-knowing that Christ is with you. All you need to do is ask.

Job's story continues with 3 of his friends Epliphaz, Bildad and Zophar going to him to console him for his losses. They did not recognize their friend at first, they wept and they tore their robes and then sat with him for 7 days. Job grieved his many losses and during this time, no one said anything because they saw how great his suffering was. After the 7<sup>th</sup> day, Job spoke and because he spoke, the friends were then able to verbalize their concerns, listen to him and offer their support.

It is in these discussions as presented in Ch. 3 to 41 that Job's relationship with God is now being questioned, tested and tried. Job presents arguments which question God's role in creation and whether Job should still be alive because of all which he has lost. Is the world controlled by an all power but arbitrary God or by a God who did not always control what happened in it? Is God in charge and are people merely players? He also asks, "Does everything happen for a reason?"

Have you ever heard anyone say something like "God must have His reasons" why such and such situation has occurred. But really is it God who is acting because we want to believe that God is in charge. Maybe this has something to do with our theology of God—do we fear or love God? Can we as faithful people be angry at God? Can we doubt God's actions or non-actions in certain situations and yet still believe?

Job's arguments with his 3 friends comprise most of the book. And for many people it is difficult to read. How dare Job question God's love for him? How could his friends say he was not perfect and to just 'get over' the losses he experienced? Job is offended by them because they are not supporting him but are the friends wrong? Or was God wrong in these actions against Job? These questions and discussion are valuable to each of the friends and Job because each person grows in their understanding of God, and who they are with each other and relationship with God.

William Safire writes in "The First Dissident: The Book of Job in today's Politics" that Job was chosen by God because "he was God's favourite, the only blameless man on earth. He was the 'one whose innocence made his suffering seem especially inappropriate or meaningless.'" (6) But to Job what is really being tested is whether God is fair or just? Job's integrity is maintained throughout the test. He has always believed in God. He also believes in justice in spite of believing in God and believes in God in spite of believing in justice. (7) Job only questioned fairness .Why him?

This might lead us to ask the question: Is God just or unjust at all? Isn't God just God-free to do what God himself wants to do with his creation? Does this matter?

And of course there are many answers to this as many people question is there God at all? And if so, didn't He say he loves us so much? Why did he put Job to the test? Because God knew that Job would not fail. Job loves and trusts and fears God all at once. This is important for us because we want to believe that God is just, loving fair and always in control. But maybe we need to reflect on Godself.

Sages of old tell us that "God is like a mirror. The mirror never changes, but everyone who looks at it sees a different face. Some people read Job and find that it confirms what they already want to believe. They find their own face looking back at them. Others approach Job open mindedly with the hope to seeing something different than before; something that will lead them to a new understanding of life, relationship, their faith and God.

When we each read Job the story and the poems seem different because we each bring our own faith and personal history to what Job experiences and shares with his friends. Because of this, when we come to the end of the book where God restores Job's wealth, he receives a new family, and his friends rejoice with him we are content or least we can state, "I've never thought of it—loss, lamenting, grief, justice – whatever it might be --like that before. " And this is what has intrigued people for generations about this pious, good living man who was tested for being himself before God.

God told Job, "It will not be a perfect world but it will be a world marked by great natural beauty, inspiring human creativity and astonishing human resilience and I will be with you in all of those times." What do you think about God's statement? How would you respond to God? What would you say to God?

Rabbi Kushner writes, "I repudiate (recant) my past accusations, my doubts, even my anger. I have experienced the reality of God. I know that I am not alone, and vulnerable mortal that I am, I am comforted." Job experienced much loss and yet what he gained was far beyond the wealth he had in sheep and cattle, more than a large family and wealth. Job came to know God and his relationship was good. From within his heart and his thoughts, Job regained hope and faith and all was well with him. We are told that Job lived 140 years and saw his family grow to the 4<sup>th</sup> generation.

What about you? Having heard Job's story of faith how is your relationship with God right now? Are you questioning him, content with your life or are you angry and needing to vent about something else? Do you feel that you are being tested for your faith in this moment? Or are you well from within?

Let us take the time in this moment to reflect upon our relationship with God- His Son Jesus as the Spirit moves amongst us.

Holy God, you are our creator and yet we sometimes wonder our role, our purpose and even why we do what we do. Reveal yourself to us as we question our faith, as we wonder about you and as we pray for healing in our world especially where there are people determined to kill others without understanding who they are and why. We pray to you knowing that our world is not perfect but we seek perfection through you. We pray about the questions we have about who you are and our relationship with you and look for answers. Reveal yourself to us so that we will sing of you with strong faith and conviction. Amen.

#### (NOTES)

1. Harold S. Kushner, The Book of Job When Bad Things Happened to a Good Person, p.10
2. Kushner, p.12
3. Kushner, p.13-20
4. Kushner, p. 21

5. 5 Kushner. p.22
6. William Safire "The First Dissident: The Book of Job in Today's Politics, p.45.
7. Safire, p. 21