

Sunday, August 8, 2021

Job 1:1-3,6-22 and Summary Reading from Ch.13,14,17,19and 42

“Job’s Suffering, Struggles and Hope”

We continue our summer series “At Your Request” with requests of topics from some of our church members. Today’s focus is Job who is at the centre of a test between God and Satan. Job is subjected to many survival tests but it is through his story whereby he listens to his friends, talks with God and eventually outwits, outplays and outlasts all what was put before him to live again. Job’s story is filled with many losses, grief, and struggles. He questions God and often asks, why him? Job’s story is a story of loss, of wrestling with believing and trusting in God, and seeking answers where no one seems to know the truth. It is Job’s story where physical, Spiritual and mental illnesses collide with his idea of following God and what is most significant is a loss of hope.

We are introduced to Job as a man highly recognized by his family, and peers ‘as the greatest of all the people in the east.’ He is also known by God. Job “was blameless, upright, feared God and turned away from evil. He was blessed with a large family- 7 sons, 3 daughters; and livestock- 7000 sheep, 3000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 donkeys, and had many servants.”

But what occurs next is not usual as God and Satan discuss Job as a man faithful to God. Satan asks whether Job fears God for nothing or asks if Job is just really over protected and wealthy. What would happen if?- is the challenge made by Satan to God. God responds by stating that ‘all that he has is in your-Satan’s power. The only thing that Satan cannot do is kill him or strike his hand against him. So the test begins for Job? But what about God? Is Satan also testing God about what being a faithful person really means?

Job then hears of the deaths of his sons, daughters, livestock, and most of his servants. He then takes on the grief and mourning posture of tearing his robes, shaving his head and falling on the ground. He worships God and blesses His name.

Today many people are grieving losses-over 4 million people have died from covid19 worldwide; this number does not include those who have died from other diseases, accidents, or naturally. The amount of tears shed is innumerable to measure- our world is grieving and mourning and will continue to do so until this virus is no longer a threat to human health. But this is not the only reason for grieving in this time- there are many people with other losses because of disasters through fire, drought, flood, tornadoes leaving many homeless and mostly without hope of any kind. The sound of tears resounds over and over again. But there are still many people seeking help because of other problems not associated with the pandemic- there are food shortages, political upheavals, and migration as people strive to achieve a better life.

Job faced traumatic loss-family, business, home and yet he worshiped God- anyway. And Satan witnessed this. Satan wanted to further test Satan so that his losses were not just

around him, but his physical health. All God said, was do not kill him. Satan then covered Job with sores all over his body. Using a potsherd (broken piece of pottery) Job scraped the sores of the infection and laid in dirt in the hope of drying up the sores. Mrs. Job went up to him and saw his body and asked him if he really needed to full of integrity after all God caused this to her family. She told him to curse and deny God.

Job's wife saw her husband in low estate, scraping his bodily sores like an outcast who lives in the street. She wanted Job to deny God- but what was she really thinking? We can only wonder! So Job is alone- his family is dead, his wife is not helping him and what he had worked for his whole life is gone. And yet he states—shall we receive the good at the hand of the God and not the bad?

Job's outlook shifts when his three friends sat in silence for a week- what was not said spoke volumes and played a key role into Job's story. The friends did not know what to say and do but just were present. Throughout these past 18 months there were many silent moments in our world; when stay at home orders were made, when businesses closed, when we remained home often sitting in silence and wondering what will happen next.

Many people struggle with being alone in a crowded house or are unsure of what to say to people when they do meet as we ease into reopening. We have established a mindset that causes us to be afraid of what might happen- even if we talk on the phone, or see a person we know on the street. What are these mental stressors we place on ourselves or others and are they valid?

Job was in this situation- what more could happen to him? What mental state was he in? He was angry just we have seen people take to the streets in anger because of violation of rights. He was lost and alone- his friends questioned what he had done wrong for God to punish him. But this was not true and he complains to God that he continues to suffer. Another friend tells him he should repent in order to be renewed- but Job didn't do anything wrong but remain faithful to God. Job's response was that there was no one who really understood what occurred- no mediator between him a man and God. And the third friend tells him he is guilty and should be punished. But what is he guilty of doing? Worshiping God? Questioning God's actions with his life? Complaining to God over his situation? Don't we all do this now?

Often upon hearing sad news- we respond- "O no, not so and so"; but unlike those believers of years gone by, we do not state that their sins caused the negative situation in their lives. We are merely expressing our change and regret in our relationship with the person involved depending upon what the news is- illness, death, job loss, suffering. But Job does not say this because his hope is in God. "I know that my Redeemer lives and at the last he will stand upon the earth." Did Job prophesy to the One who was to come, and not fully know it? Or was God realizing something new? The people will need a Saviour, because most people did not support this faithful servant in Job. They needed to learn about God's grace and love. They needed to be like Job humble and wondering about life in order to return to His ways.

In these last months of struggling with what has been happening with many people:

--physically- challenges some of you have experienced with discovery of unusual lumps, and moles, or falling and having surgery, or medical tests that leave you unclear, or being tested for covid19 and having to isolate

-mentally—having difficulty coping with staying at home, not shopping, not seeing family or friends as you like or even feeling alone and lonely,

Spiritually- in the moments of questioning- you wonder where God is and even the purpose of your life or life in general

Intellectually- you are wanting to learn a new skill, read more and take the time to do so, but even wonder what to learn or where to spend your time doing so

Emotionally –are often on a roller coaster—remembering fun stories and events of the past, to tearing up for what we might think is no reason; we might laugh at the simplest story or cry wondering what we are mourning.

And what did you do in these times? Were you doing busy work things around the house? Did you take time to learn something new? Did you pray for peace and healing? Maybe you read the Bible and learned about Jesus. Or maybe you just sat in silence and the Spirit

All of these struggles were experienced by Job and we need to look at what he did as he struggled in all these ways wondering if life would get any better. He believed and trusted God to see him through whatever he faced. He prayed not just the simple thank you or praise prayers, but he prayed dangerously asking God the tough questions as he sought answers to his predicament and future. He looked for healing and to he realized that God was in charge and not him. He realized that God never left him but was testing him and he commitment in the covenant he first made with him upon believing.

If we say we believe in God, we too enter a covenant relationship- where God will be our God and we are his people. We do this because we have faith and trust that God will fulfill his promises to us. From covenant to promise we are able to know God and count on him—no matter what the struggles are in our lives. We just need to imagine God's loving embrace around us always.

Job prayed confessing his faith and believe in him. And God heard his prayer and accepted it. God set Job up in a test and he passed- but he also learned from this test- that God loved him. God restored the fortunes of Job giving him twice as much as before.

We all have struggles- they may not be complex like Job's – all at once, but we do struggle with life and its uncertainties. Are we willing to trust God to help us each day? This is

what God knew Job did when he first spoke to Satan. He knew Job's faith- would not fail him, but would probably grow as he trusted God even when everything else was gone.

Job knew and believed in God- the one who redeemed him and saved him. WE have been granted the gift of new life through our Redeemer God's Son. Are we willing to trust him with our lives no matter what occurs= physically, mentally, spiritually, intellectually, and emotionally? This is where hope is found- in Jesus Christ for God promised us a Saviour and it is Jesus Christ.

Maybe we need to remember these words by Corrie Ten Boom who was imprisoned during World War II along with her family for harboring hundreds of Jews protecting them from Nazi authorities. Corrie survived and started a worldwide ministry and later told her story in a book entitled The Hiding Place. She had faith in God; suffered much in prison, lost her family and yet lived to tell her story as a faithful disciple of Jesus. She writes, "Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God."

Our future is unknown; there is talk about a fourth wave of people getting the covid19 virus due to lack of vaccinations but we who believe know God and do not need to be afraid. We trust in God. Thanks be to God.

PRAYER God of love we thank you for Job and his story of trusting in you when everything else was lost. We pray that in our lives we too may fully trust you to guide and lead us no matter where we go or what we do. He did not give up his love for you God nor did he stop believing. Help us O God to be faithful and to fully trust you now and in the days ahead. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.