

Job Teaching for High School and Middle School Ministries 09.30.06

- † whiteboard [set up]
 - † ripping shirt
 - † hat over shaved head
 - † pick a student to help
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1. The Story of Job

What are your goals for your adult life?

Today, we are going to discuss a man named Job. He had everything you could dream of: he was the richest man around; he had seven sons and three daughters, all of them loving and good; obviously he had a good marriage too; he had servants to do everything for him; he had good health and happiness; he had good friends and a good reputation; he had a good relationship with God, and God blessed him in every way. You would have liked having Job's life!

But imagine how you would feel if you experienced what Job did next. All at once, people came and stole all his wealth and killed his servants; and just as he was learning about that, he also learned that all his children had died in a freak accident.

That would be pretty hard to take, wouldn't it? Job was distressed, as you can imagine. The Bible says he tore his robe **[do it]** and shaved his head **[show it]**, which is the way people showed grief in those days. But then Job did an interesting thing: he fell to the ground and said [1:21 NASB]:

“Naked I came from my mother's womb,
And naked I shall return there.
The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away.
Blessed be the name of the Lord.”

I think this was a pretty amazing thing to say at a time like that. Consider how philosophical and honorable toward God you are when terrible things happen to you! I am impressed with Job's character. He was devastated, but **JOB KNEW SO WELL WHAT HE BELIEVED, THAT HARD TIMES DIDN'T CHANGE HIM.** He was the same after the tragedy as he was before. Most of us are not like this. This is one thing Job did right.

His situation got worse. While Job was mourning his losses, he got ugly, puss-filled, sores all over his body, and they didn't go away. [Please note that I made the command decision not to model this for you; I didn't mind shaving my head, but I had to draw the line here.] It was so disgusting with all the puss, that Job had to sit outside where they threw out the garbage, scraping off the puss with pieces of pottery. Then one day his wife came out and told him: **[have a student do it!]** “Are you still trying to maintain your integrity? Curse God and die!” Are any of you married? no? Well, think of how you would feel if the person whose opinion matters most to you essentially told you he or she had given up on you and you should just go ahead and die!

Job replied, “You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?” Not the most witty comeback ever, but not sinful either! Sometimes our wit leads us into sin.

Just to make his suffering complete, one more thing happened: his three best friends came along and argued with him that all these bad things were his own fault, that they were happening because of his sins; and these friends wouldn’t go away, they just kept arguing with him. You can imagine what a comfort such friends were at such a time!

In the Bible, the reader gets to know something that Job does not: This whole thing started when God was having a discussion with Satan! Satan had been wandering about on the earth. God said, “Have you considered my servant Job? Most righteous man around!” **[expand?]**

Satan said to God, “Oh sure, Job is righteous because you keep blessing him! Making him rich and healthy and giving him all those great children and that wonderful wife. Let some suffering come to him, and then he will curse your name for sure!” So God said, “I’ll tell you what, do whatever you want to his life, just don’t harm him personally, and we will see.” So Satan killed off all the children and took away all the wealth, but as we saw, Job was remained righteous.

So Satan came back to God and God said again, “Hey, have you seen my man Job?” **[expand?]** Satan said, “Obviously he didn’t care much for his children or his assets, but if you made him suffer physically, then he would curse your name for sure.” So God said, “Go ahead and do what you will to him, just don’t kill him.” So Satan afflicted Job with the puss-filled sores.

As you read the book of Job, you wonder three things:

1. you wonder whether Job can remain righteous, having lost everything, suffering acute physical discomfort, and being ridiculed by his wife and friends – how long can he take it?
2. you also want to know if God will leave Job in his suffering or rescue him;
3. but what really gets to Job himself is that he feels this is unfair, and both Job and the reader wonder whether God will explain why he would let this happen.

Let’s look first at Job’s actions. As we have said, Job responded well to his situation. But as time went on, and his friends continued [for about thirty chapters!] to accuse him of causing all these problems, Job started to crack. At first he was just sorry he was born; but later he started to assert that he *deserved* better, and he started to get *demanding* toward God. Eventually, though never losing his faith, he declared that *God was persecuting him unjustly*.

As for the second question, whether Job would continue on suffering, we look at the very end of the book and see the answer is no. God restored Job’s fortunes, so that he ended up with more wealth, more children, and a very long and happy life. I assume God gave Job a new wife; I cannot imagine making babies with someone who told me to curse God and die. Well, maybe she got over it; she had been suffering too, of course. Anyway, the Bible doesn’t say whether it was the same wife, but they lived happily in any case.

As to the third question – the big question! – whether God would explain all this to Job and us, the answer is ... no! Remember, Job had said he deserved better and that God was persecuting him unjustly. God rebuked Job for over four chapters. The best of it is this [38:2-4; 40:8 NLT]:

“Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorant words? Brace yourself, because I have some questions for you, and you must answer them. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if you know so much... Are you going to discredit my justice and condemn me so you can say you are right?”

GOD TOLD JOB THAT HUMANS HAD NO RIGHT TO QUESTION GOD.

2. So we are left to ask, “What does this all mean?”

What Job did right:

A. JOB KNEW WELL WHAT HE BELIEVED, SO THAT HARD TIMES DIDN’T CHANGE HIM. WE NEED TO LEARN OUR BIBLE WELL, TO STRENGTHEN OUR FAITH, SO THAT HARD TIMES DON’T CHANGE US. IT IS EASY TO ACT RIGHT WHEN YOU ARE BEING BLESSED; BUT THE TRUE MEASURE OF YOUR CHARACTER IS HOW YOU ACT WHEN TIMES ARE TOUGH.

B. WHEN GOD SHOWED HIM HE WAS WRONG ABOUT SOMETHING, JOB REPENTED. WE NEED TO BE OPEN TO GOD CHANGING US, AS WE LEARN ABOUT THE BIBLE AND PRAY.

C. FROM THIS EXPERIENCE, JOB LEARNED ABOUT AND APPRECIATED GOD MORE, AND HE GAINED HUMILITY. AS THE BIBLE TEACHES ELSEWHERE, WE CAN TRUST THAT GOD WILL USE ALL THINGS FOR THE GOOD OF THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.

What Job did wrong:

Job thought God should meet his expectations and explain everything to him. **GOD REPLIED THAT HIS PURPOSES ARE BEYOND THE UNDERSTANDING OF HUMANS AND THAT PEOPLE HAVE NO RIGHT TO CHALLENGE GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY OR QUESTION GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS.**

Our idea of what is right might not be the same as God’s, because our wisdom is not the same as God’s revelation. We easily misunderstand what is happening and cannot fully grasp what God is doing in a given situation. **THAT IS WHY IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE KNOW WELL WHAT WE BELIEVE, SO THAT HARD TIMES DON’T CHANGE US. ANOTHER WAY OF SAYING THAT IS THAT WE HAVE TO TRUST GOD AND CONTINUE TO ACT IN FAITH AND OBEDIENCE, NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS.**

What Job and his friends did wrong:

A. God also rebuked Job’s friends, saying they didn’t speak correctly about him. The friends made the mistake of giving advice that was not biblical. If anyone comes to me for advice, **I ALWAYS FIND THE ANSWER IN GOD’S REVELATION, THE BIBLE!** Job’s friends didn’t do that, so they hurt him unnecessarily and got in trouble with God.

B. Job and his friends had unbiblical thinking: the friends thought Job had caused all his own problems by being sinful and Job thought nothing bad should have happened to him because he

was not sinful. They all thought that when something good happened it meant you were good in God's eyes and when something bad happened then it meant you were bad in God's eyes. **THIS IS WRONG, IT IS NOT BIBLICAL. WE KNOW GOD WILL BRING JUSTICE, BUT SOMETIMES THE REWARDS ARE DELAYED OR NOT IN THIS LIFETIME.**

3. Application

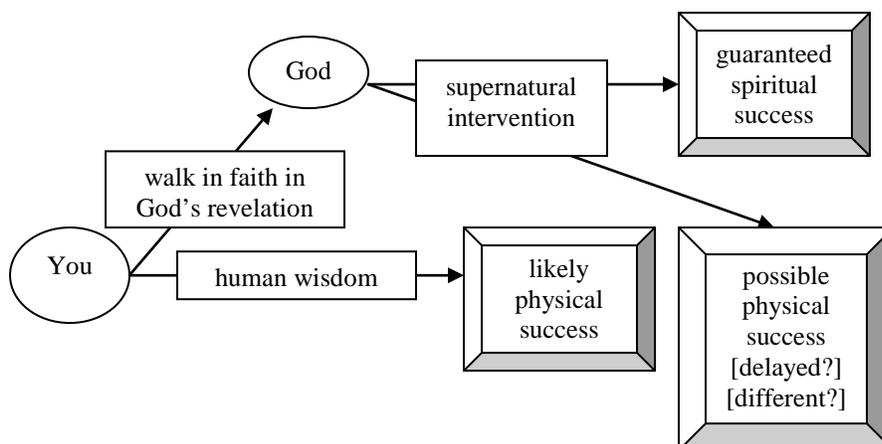
How many of you have questions about why the world is the way it is, or why God allows bad things to happen? How many of you have ever experienced something you couldn't understand, like someone you love suffering, or you got a raw deal at school or in some club or team? I am having a tough year in that respect. This year, my uncle died, another person I knew died, my cat died, my dog died, I haven't been able to find a job so I am going broke, and some friends have turned on me.

The thing that troubled me the most was my uncle dying. He had not accepted in faith the gift of forgiveness that God offers us because of Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross, so my uncle is now in Hell. That really bothers me. I thought I would have more time to witness to him about my faith. I got a bit angry with God, asking him why he would let someone go to Hell like that. Interestingly, I got an answer a lot like Job did: I am in seminary, studying to be a pastor, and when my uncle died we were studying the book of Romans. In Romans chapter 9 it talks about this very issue with which I struggled, and it says, "Who are you, O man, to answer back to God?"

You see, our problem is that we must operate on limited knowledge: we don't know why some things happen and we don't know for certain what God is accomplishing in us or through us at any given time. God had a purpose in what he let happen to Job, but Job didn't know what it was, and neither do we.

So the key is, **WE HAVE TO TRUST GOD AND CONTINUE TO ACT IN FAITH AND OBEDIENCE, NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS. IN OTHER WORDS: KEEP DOING WHAT YOU KNOW IS RIGHT AND TRUST IN GOD TO DO THE SAME.** For we can trust that God [in due time] will bring about what is right, beyond our ability to understand.

IN ANY SITUATION, WE HAVE TWO CHOICES: WE CAN OPERATE ON HUMAN WISDOM OR GOD'S REVELATION.



Whatever you want in this world – money, power, success, popularity, sex, whatever – chances are that you can figure out a way to get it. You can use human wisdom and achieve your goals. However, that method often involves sin, either doing something wrong [like lying] or not adapting your life to God’s priorities.

The other option is to walk in faith, praying about what you want, and then – instead of acting on human wisdom – acting on what you find in God’s Word. God might give you what you want; but he might not; or he might change it in some unforeseeable way; or he might delay acting for some time. So doing things God’s way makes worldly success less certain in some ways; but what it guarantees you is spiritual blessing: greater intimacy with God, greater treasures in Heaven, spiritual growth, and many other things.

Satan thought Job was a bottom line kind of guy, and that he would curse God once things got tough. Job really was a top line guy, he walked in faith, but he didn’t understand that sometimes there is a delay in God’s justice.

WHEN YOU STRUGGLE IN LIFE AND STRUGGLE TO UNDERSTAND GOD, DON’T GIVE UP HOPE OR YOUR FAITH IN HIM: TRUST GOD AND CONTINUE TO ACT IN FAITH AND OBEDIENCE, NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS. KEEP DOING WHAT YOU KNOW IS RIGHT AND TRUST IN HIM TO DO THE SAME.

4. Interesting feature

For about thirty chapters, Job argued with his three friends. Then – seemingly out of the blue – there appears a young man named Elihu. Apparently Elihu was watching the argument for some time, not budding in because he was younger than they. But when Job’s three friends had finished arguing with him, Elihu chose to speak, and he was angry with Job *and* the three friends! Elihu was angry with Job for trying to justify himself before God and with the three friends for condemning Job even though they didn’t have a good answer for him.

So Elihu spoke, and he said he spoke for God and was led by the Holy Spirit! And it is interesting to note that Elihu is the only one in the story whom God did not rebuke. But here is the cool part. There was a storm rolling in where they sat. And Elihu began to use the storm to describe God [37:2-5 NLT]:

“Listen closely to the thunder of His voice,
And the rumbling that goes out from His mouth.
Listen carefully to the thunder of God's voice as it rolls from his mouth.

Under the whole heaven He lets it loose,
And His lightning to the ends of the earth.
It rolls across the heavens, and his lightning flashes out in every direction.

After it, a voice roars;
He thunders with His majestic voice,
And He does not restrain the lightnings when His voice is heard.

Then comes the roaring of the thunder – the tremendous voice of his majesty.
He does not restrain the thunder when he speaks.
God thunders with His voice wondrously,
Doing great things which we cannot comprehend.”

And the Bible says [38:1-4]: “Then the LORD answered Job from the whirlwind: ‘Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorant words? Brace yourself, because I have some questions for you, and you must answer them. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if you know so much...’”

God was in the storm, and God sent Elihu to bring some truth to the conversation and to introduce God.