

There once was a man. The first in a series on the book of Job, preached on January 14, 2018 at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons JOB 1:1, 2:1-10

II CORINTHIANS 4:5-12

1 There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.

So begins a Biblical book that commentators say is unique in both ancient literature and in the scriptures.

The themes it addresses – innocent suffering – why do so many very good people have such a disproportionate number of afflictions and tragedies,

While many dishonest, selfish and greedy people have comfortable lives;

The seeming silence of God.

Job contains a critique of nearly all the common answers to the problem of evil

Holding fast to an unswerving faith in God – despite all the nasty things happening around one and to one are considered in this book and reflected upon in other places in scripture.

But, not as immediately, as viscerally, as poignantly and as provocatively as in Job.

In Job, we see these themes and others acted out or lived in real drama.

There is nothing abstract in this book

As we hear or read for ourselves Job's story – there are touch points in our lives

We look at Job and we see the faces of people we know or our own face

As we listen both to the counsel of Job's three friends, we may hear ourselves or have been subject to such "advice and counsel".

As we listen to Job's response to the counsel of the "friends" we may recall that time or those times when we wanted to respond as Job did.

And who of us as we read or listen to God's response to Job are not humbled to the point of saying – RIGHT!! God is not going to answer why questions.

I guess I just have to deal with that!!

If there was no such thing as affliction or misfortune in our lives;

If the why questions were never shouted out and shouted out often through tears;

If the deep questions of how could a good God exist in the light of all the misery in this world were never asked

If the “where is the meaning in this” was never voiced,

I do not think Job ever would have made it into the canon of scripture.

The fact that Job is part of the scriptures is God’s gift to us

Say what? Job – a gift of God – come on Herb

No, hear me

I think centuries of believers who take scripture seriously have found and continue to find in Job’s story *great hope and the ability to go beyond just enduring the grim.*

And in a life that is difficult, crushing at times – a way through – the knowledge that someone has gone through the worst that can happen and lived – wounded but walking – is incredibly hope giving.

Job did not have Job to read and enter into – we do!

That is what we are going to do for the next few weeks – in part by imagination of being with Job, entering his life and circumstances as we read his story.

And in part by experience – for all suffering and affliction come with a human face attached.

And take heart – we are only going to do this for 5 weeks, not 42 which are the numbers of chapters in Job.

So, this is a bird's eye view series, and we have a lot of ground to cover. So...here...we...go

The book begins with a brush stroke outline or resume of a very fine man

Not a superman

Not an angel in a human's body – but, just a man.

Blameless, not perfect

Blameless means that he did not compromise with moral evil.

Job's business dealings were handled with integrity.

He kept his word

He dealt fairly with others

As a result, he was respected by those around him – whether within or outside the family

He was upright

He respected God.

He was a man with character

He was blessed with 7 sons and 3 daughters and had amassed a number of possessions and wealth

His was a life at its zenith, its peak – the William

Blake illustration on this morning's cover is a good depiction of Job as the book begins

Job was as well a man spiritually sensitive – not only regarding his life, but for the spiritual life of his children.

A word about the William Blake illustrations which will appear throughout the series.

Blake's was an English engraver, painter, artist, poet and visionary – interesting individual in many ways!

The illustrations were done between 1821-22. They are among the best known of Blake's work.

This morning's illustration shows Job surrounded by those things special to him. There is a feeling of happiness and thanksgiving in the illustration.

If Job were only a stage play or a movie – the delineation between the first five verses and the rest of the story would have a fade out. Or a curtain down and the lights dimmed.

For beginning with verse 6 the scene changes to the heavenly realms and the author of Job outlines the insidious wager between the Satan or the accuser and God that will change completely Job's earthly life. Everything Job holds dear and precious – including his health – will be ripped from him. What we have by the end of chapter 2 – see this next week – is of a sore covered individual left with a host of questions. And not many answers. Yet, an individual who in the midst of such awfulness initially declares

**“Naked I came from my mother's womb,
and naked shall I return there;**

the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”

And in response to his wife’s counsel

Curse God and die

Replies

, “You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?”

Then the author of Job adds an important sentence

In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

There is nothing cute, or trite, or banal or vacuous in Job’s affirmations

This is not mere resignation on Job’s part.

Rather, in the light of what Job has lost,

What he has left – little if anything – this is what Job affirms and holds to

This is what he is prepared to stand upon.

Make no mistake about it; these two declarations do not come easily.

Frankly, I do not think they came easily to Job

Scripture tends often to compress time between events and human reactions

We are not specifically told how long it was between the ‘news of fresh disasters’ and Job’s reactions and declarations

But there the declarations stand!

Reminders of undeniable truth.

-a difficult and brutal reality

Yet reality, nevertheless

Reality that Job holds to as the story unfolds and if it can be believed, grimmer for Job.

I believe Job's declarations here in chapter 2 serve as *reminders of undeniable truth for us*

I do not say that lightly,

Nor do I say that to in any way minimize affliction, pain and suffering.

Life experience in general and pastoral ministry in particular brings to mind all too readily faces of people and specific situations that are Job-like – bad things happening to good and righteous people.

Life is not always fair.

There are no guarantees in this life – save for God's abiding love for those who are prepared to trust and obey him

But that love does not mean there will be no more struggle, tears, crying or pain

We live in a fallen world

There is no place to go on vacation from a fallen world

Trials are inevitable – they are a normal part of the Christian life

GOD IS SOVEREIGN – no question

Yet, that does not mean believers will live perfect

Teflon – no stick lives

If somehow you have been encouraged to believe that Christianity is a way out of trials, affliction, pain and suffering, then the book of Job and other places in scripture are crystal clear reminders that this is not the case.

In times when the bottom drops out of your life – what are you going to hold to?

Job's declarations point to the only way – God!

The opening two chapters of Job also describe the 'wager'

This is the only mention of the heavenly drama.

After chapter 2, the matter of the wager is left behind

What follows for the remainder of the book of Job is a no-holds barred argument about God's role in the world – the likes of which we find nowhere else in the Bible.

Well, what about this wager?

What are we to make of it?

Are we just mere game pieces on a heavenly chess board or bocce court?

Absolutely NOT!

We are too precious and too much loved by God to be viewed as mere game pieces.

So put such an idea out of your heads!!

What then is this about?

We are moving into things beyond our immediate and total understanding

We are moving into mystery and things of God that we may never understand completely – even on the other side of this life!!

I think the author of Job has pulled back the curtain of heaven for us to give us a brief glimpse of the ongoing battle between God and Satan or the accuser

It is not a fist fight between God and Satan.
God is sovereign.

Rather, it is a battle where the goal of Satan is to get God's beloved creatures, precious in his sight – each of us – to turn from trusting God to cursing God;
From wanting to draw closer to God, to walking even running away from God;
From leaning on God more, to leaning on him less!

Look at the dialogue in that section from Job 2 Helen read

God says, **Job is blameless and upright**

He is a man of integrity – even though he has lost everything.

Satan's reply

All that people have they will give to save their lives...let me God touch him with sickness, sores actually and he will curse you. You just wait and see.

Even covered with loathsome and painful sores – Job does not abandon or turn from God does he?

In place of the expected cursing of God comes a second declaration by Job

“You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?”

And that added comment

In all this, Job did not sin with his lips

As I said, this is the last time the wager is mentioned

The author closes the curtains of heaven and the story moves back to the world with Job dealing with his sore, his wife and his friends.

Little if anything looks to have changed. Bad things have happened to a good person. What IS the point of including the waters of chapters 1 and 2 of Job?

I think the wagers remind us quite clearly and dramatically that our reactions and what we do as a result of them in our times of pain, suffering and affliction have consequences way beyond that of the immediate world around us

They do impact the immediate no question – come back to that in a moment

When we hold the course as it were,
Continue to trust in God in spite of the grim around us and even within us,
God wins a victory against the power of evil.

I do not say that lightly, indifferently or in a cavalier way

I have sat at too many bedsides,

Listened to too many people in incredible pain and distress

Stood at or conducted too many tragic funerals to believe that trusting in God in extremes is easy.

It is not!

But the hope in which I live and the assurance I have about the worth of people's lives and their actions,

Especially at times which seems to be a waste

Comes from affirmations like Job's here in chapters 1 and 2

There is meaning and purpose in our lives – even if we cannot immediately see it.

One of the evil one's most persistent lies is "If you are a good Christian, you should not be suffering at all.

To suffer is reflective of poor faith!

We know that is a lie.

What if we were to live through those suffering times – often affirming in tears and discomfort – I KNOW GOD IS WITH ME IN THIS TIME – WHATEVER HAPPENS – HE WILL NEVER ABANDON ME

That's a victory in heaven for God

It is also a statement of conviction and hope – a witness to a watching world

And believe me, the world is watching!!!

The world is waiting for us to in extremis situations – curse God

For it would confirm that our words about God, faith, Jesus to be just words for the good times – surface only – talk with no substance.

Affliction, pain and suffering are things with which we will deal throughout our lives – if not our own, then in the lives of people we love and know. How we deal with such things remains a real test of our trust,

Faith, obedience to the Risen Lord of time and history

Remember, each of us really do matter to God

What we do, say and think really does matter to God. AMEN