

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SERMON: **Job**
SERIES: **Old Testament**
SCRIPTURES: **Job**
SPEAKER: **Shaun Kipe**
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**Credit to Philip Yancey and John Ortberg for valuable insights/illustrations.*

Well good morning, it so great to worship with you.

Announce: **VBS volunteers, Connect Lunch, Connect Class**

We started a series last week called “The Old Testament...Why Bother?” (**Series Title Slide**)

Perhaps you’ve picked up a Bible and thought, “I should really read this.” You made an initial attempt. But very quickly you were left shaking your head in wonder. Confused or offended and just not sure how to make sense of a world that seems so strange.

And so the purpose of this series is to encourage us and also give us some of the tools necessary to begin engaging with the Old Testament.

This morning we are going to focus our attention on the Old Testament **book of Job**. If you have a Bible go ahead and pull it out. The book of Job, is found about half way through your Bible.

If you’ve been looking for a book in the Old Testament to read, this may be a good one. The book of Job is it’s own stand-alone story. It’s 42 chapters long.

And most scholars believe that the book of Job is the earliest recorded writing in the Bible. Remember the Old Testament is not in chronological order. It's actually arranged more topically than anything else.

How does a story, written so long ago, overlap and connect with your world and my world today?

Let's dive in. At the very beginning of the story, we meet the main character.

I. Job (Chapters 1-2)

And here's what you need to know about Job. Job is the "picture-perfect man." He's got it all.

Job 1 - In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. ² He had seven sons and three daughters, ³ and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants.

In ancient Hebrew talk we might paraphrase this as... *"There once lived the perfect man. He had the perfect number of sons and the perfect number of daughters. He had the perfect number of sheep, the perfect number of camels, the perfect number of oxen and the perfect number of donkey's. He is blameless & upright before God."*

In fact, he was so upright before God, we are told in the story that when his children would throw a party.

Job would offer sacrifices on their behalf, just in case they got a little rowdy at the party and, you know sinned a little bit. Just in case...Job went ahead offered sacrifices on their behalf!

And in case you missed such a striking description, the author goes ahead and sums Job up by saying...

He was the greatest man among all the people of the East.

Any questions?

But, this all about to change. Unbeknownst to Job, in the heavenly realms, an Accuser (Satan), approaches God. And says, *“The only reason, Job is such a good guy (blameless and upright) is because, you’ve given him the perfect life (wealth and family and servants). Take all that away and I bet you, Job will turn his back on you.”*

God says, *“Ok...lets see.”*

Job 1:12 - ¹² The LORD said to Satan, “Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.”

“You may take everything, just not his life.”

And very quickly...*“Job’s life is flipped, turned-upside.”*

Ready...take a deep breath....

A servant comes running up to Job and says, *“Master, a group of intruders surprise-attacked us out in the fields, and they stole all of your oxen and donkeys and killed all of your field workers, and I’m the only who escaped to tell you this.”*

And while he is still talking, another servant comes running up. *“Master, fire from heaven came out of nowhere and consumed all of your sheep and sheep-herders and I’m the only who escaped to tell you.”*

And while he is still talking, another servant comes running up... *“Master, another group of intruders surprise attacked and stole all of your camels and killed all of your camel-herders and I’m the only one who escaped to tell you.”*

And while he is still talking, another servant comes running up...and says, *“Master, all of your children were partying together and a great wind blew in and collapsed the house and they, including all of your household servants, are now dead and I’m the only one who escaped to tell you.”*

And Job responds with a line that you have heard perhaps many, many times before...

“The Lord gives and the Lord takes away.”

Just pause for a moment.

Have you ever found yourself, looking around your life, or our world and you think... life’s not fair!

Deep within the human soul we all have this notion of justice. Right and wrong. And we all know when that notion has been violated.

I heard a story about a gentleman David Hagler, he was the Program director for LA Sports & Law Chapter, and he also works as an umpire. And he says, that he was driving too fast in the snow in Bolder, Colorado and a policeman pulled him over and gave him a speeding ticket.

And he says, I tried to talk him out of it, telling him “how worried I was about insurance and how I’m typically a good and careful driver.”

And the officer said I should go to court and try to get the fine reduced or thrown out.

The first game of the next baseball season I’m umpiring behind home plate and the first batter up is this same policeman. I recognize him. He recognizes me.

He asks me how the thing went with the ticket.

I tell him, you better swing at everything!

(John Ortberg)

Deep within the human soul we all have this notion of justice. And we all know when that notion has been violated.

The story of Job, is intended to violate our notion of justice. It is the Bible, crying out about real life and saying **“Life’s not fair.”** “Why is this happening?”

A young father and national icon is killed in a plane crash with his daughter sitting by his side, along with seven others. And we’re left wondering, “What, just happened?”

Devastating wild fires in Australia, destroying homes and ecosystems and putting animals on the verge of extinction. “Why...”

Families watch as aging loved ones begin to lose the battle of the mind to dementia/Alzheimer’s. Unable to recognize or call by the name the people the love most dearly. “Why is this happening?”

One nation, in the name of justice, attacks another nation and civilians are called collateral damage. People are killed, children orphaned. And every one of them is somebody’s son or daughter with hopes and dreams about life...created in the image of God. “Why is that happening?”

Couples who would make wonderful parents, are unable to be parents...while child abuse in other homes runs rampant. "Why does that happen?"

Have you read about the statistics of sex trafficking that occurs during the Superbowl. Rich, wealthy men take advantage of young girls and seemingly get away with it as a nation and governments turn their heads and look the other way. "Why is that happening?"

Every day young boys and girls are exploited in underground mines, so that the rich and powerful can enjoy life's pleasures. "Why is that happening?"

This is the story of Job. While our initial thought might be, I don't know much about sheep farming and I do not make a living as a camel herder, what does his ancient story have to do with my life... doesn't take long to see our world in Job's world, does it?

Job 6 - "If only my anguish could be weighed and all my misery be placed on the scales! ³ It would surely outweigh the sand of the seas..."

If there was such a thing as a pain-o-meter that could measure the depth of human suffering, in the same way we measure the depth of the ocean, how deep would the ocean of human suffering be? (John Ortberg)

The story of Job brings us face to face with what has been called the problem of suffering/pain. Is it possible to believe in a good God, who is all-loving and all-powerful in the face of human tragedy?

This has been the reason many people leave their faith behind. Can't make sense of human suffering? Can you relate?

Isn't it fascinating that oldest book in the Bible, is about this very real question that you and I are still faced with today? Why would God include this in his sacred book? Wouldn't it be best to leave this stuff out?

But you see, that's the great thing about the Old Testament, it's about real life and God doesn't leave real life out. Job's story cries out with and me, "Why, why, why?"

Back to the story...

II. Job's Friends (Chapters 3-37)

In the midst of Job's great loss, confusion, suffering...4 of Job's friends arrive to bring consolation. (Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar and Elihu).

When the friends first arrive, Job is so broken they hardly recognize him. These tragedies have nearly destroyed him. But as the friends sit with Job and listen as he begins crying out to God for answers...it's almost like they can't help themselves. They feel the need to explain Job's suffering.

Do you know people like this? Always trying to fix it or explain it? Listen to a few snippets from Job's friends...

Job 4:7 - "Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed?"

Job 11:14-15 - ¹⁴ if you put away the sin that is in your hand...¹⁵ then, free of fault, you will lift up your face; you will stand firm...

Job 22:5 - Is not your wickedness great? Are not your sins endless?

Job 20:6-7 - ...the pride of the godless person reaches to the heavens and his head touches the clouds, ⁷ he will perish forever, like his own dung;

For nearly 34 chapters (the vast majority of the book), Job's friends, try to explain to Job why God is treating him this way.

They list every possible theological and cliché religious answer they can come up with. In general the gist of their answers is...

“You must have sinned, so God is punishing you. If you just ask for His forgiveness, this will all be resolved.”

Of course, Job and the friends are completely unaware that the Accuser is actually the one causing the havoc and it has nothing to do with Job’s sin. The beginning of the story makes clear, Job does not deserve this. The catastrophes are not the result of his sin.

There are, in these friends, some critical points of connection to us and particularly how we relate to those that are suffering.

1. When people are suffering it’s not time for cliché religious answers.

There are times for theological conversations about suffering.

Why does evil persist if God is good and all-powerful? We need to talk about that. We need explanations. There is in fact a whole branch of theology, called “theodicy” related to this question. About the relationship of God, his goodness and evil and human suffering. Books, upon books have been written about this topic.

But you see what the friends got wrong, what we church people so often get wrong, is that the time for those conversations, is not in the midst of suffering.

Cliché christianese usually doesn’t help:

I’ve got the perfect verse for you.

It’s part of God’s good plan for your life.

God never gives us more than we can bear.

God is teaching you an important lesson.

If you think you have it bad, you should think about so-and-so

I can totally relate to what you're going through and I've come out better for it.

We like to try and fix it, explain it, answer it, don't we? Because we think that in answering the questions, we'll help to eliminate the hurt and the pain. But the truth is when hurt is this deep, cliché answers provide very little comfort.

Picture it like this...When Keagan (PIC OF KEAGAN) falls off his bike and skins his knee. I could explain to him about the chemistry of his skin cells and our nervous system, as well as the chemical make-up of the pavement, and how and why it is hard and rough. And I could go on to explain Newton's law of inertia that "an object in motion stays in motion at the same speed and in the same direction unless acted upon by an unbalanced force." And how the friction between his soft knee and that hard pavement, when they contact each other, is what causes the sensation that he experiences as pain when he falls off a moving bicycle at 10 mph.

But all of those answers will do very little for the tears streaming down his face.

Do you know I have found that really helps in those situations? A hug. When I go running over and pick him and hold him in my arms and tell him how sorry I am that he's hurting, and how much I love him.

When those around us are suffering, rather than providing intellectual or theological cliché answers, what hurting people most often need is a hug. Friends who will come running over and hold them in their arms and quietly listen, tell them how sorry they are that it hurts.

There is another valuable lesson we (church people) learn from Job's friends.

2. We need to be careful speaking on behalf of God.

Here's what I mean...while it is true that God's Holy Spirit, speaks in and through people...we need to be careful loosely throwing around the "God card", "God told me..." as a trump card, to manipulate and get people to listen.

One author says it like this...

I went to a Christian college, and the form this most often took was when somebody—usually a guy—would say to somebody—usually a girl—"God told me you're the person I'm meant to marry." The best response to this is, "You tell God to tell me, and as soon as he does, I'll get back to you." (John Ortberg – Sermon...Guide)

Ken Davis tells about a husband and wife who are on their way to a family reunion and while driving down the road, notice they are approaching a bakery in the distance. So the husband says, "We should stop at the bakery and get a donut." His wife, replies, "We don't have time, we'll be late." So the husband responded, "God is telling me we should stop at the bakery. Look, if there is an open parking spot in front of the bakery when we drive by, then we will know, it is God will for us to stop and eat a donut." And sure enough, their 8th time around the block there was an empty parking spot in front of the bakery.

Job's friends say things like...

Job 4:12 – A word was secretly brought to me, my ears caught a whisper of it...

Job 8:20 – Surely God does not reject one who is blameless or strengthen the hands of evil-doers.

For 34 chapters, Job's friends, claim to speak on behalf of God. And for 34 chapters, they were wrong!

As the book comes to its conclusion, God finally speaks up and intervenes. Listen...

Job 42 - ⁷the LORD...said to Eliphaz the Temanite, “I am angry with you and your friends, because you have not spoken the truth about me...

⁸ So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has.”

We would do well to have sense of humility regarding our claims about “God is telling me.” If you think God is telling you something, you don’t need to tell other people as a way to manipulate. Discerning God’s voice is best done as a community, all speaking and listening together.

III. God’s Answer

So what is God’s answer to Job about his suffering and human suffering in general? Interestingly enough, God never really answers that question.

In some ways, the answer in Job when it comes to human suffering is...

1. There is no satisfactory answer.

It’s a mystery...

God says things like...where were you when I created the foundation of the world? Who marked off it’s dimensions? Or stretched a measuring line across it? If you don’t understand these simple things...then human suffering and God’s goodness will always be a mystery to you.

The book of Job is not intending to explain human suffering and evil in the world but instead is the heartfelt, raw emotion of a writer baffled, confused, disoriented, and troubled by suffering. It asks all of the questions we ask related to suffering.

How long? Why me? This isn't fair. God do you hear? God do you care? God are you there? This cry fills the pages of the book of Job.

In fact, the Biblical writers in general, not just in Job but all throughout the Bible, speak much about human suffering.

The first two chapters in the Bible describe the universe before suffering. The last chapter is about existence post-suffering but most everything in between is about suffering. (Ortberg)

But mostly the Biblical writers do not try to explain suffering. They wrestle with suffering, they protest it, but they do not explain it.

Part of the point of the story of Job is not necessarily to answer the question, but just to provide readers with the knowledge that others in this world experience the same thing. Pain and suffering is not unique to anyone person or one group of people it's a human dilemma. If you're experiencing it...it means you're human.

Second,

2. It's ok to cry out in protest.

I hate pain, hurt and suffering. I hate that people I love, people I know walk through tragedy. I see the faces of real people on the news, whose lives are broken and in shambles. I sometimes, wake up at night or pause throughout the day and try to imagine what they must be feeling and I ache. (John Ortberg)

Job is my partner on that road. Job's story, in many ways is there to remind me, I'm not alone in the struggle to understand human suffering. And God can handle my crying out. He handled Job's.

Third and finally...

3. Suffering should not push away from God.

When people are asked why they don't believe in God, many immediately point to the innocent suffering in the world.

What's fascinating is that suffering has actually been the impetus behind many of the world's religions. Most world religions are born out of an awareness of human suffering and a belief that it's not right, something should be done about it. (Barbara Brown Tayler, John Ortberg)

Buddhism is born because a young, affluent prince, named Sid Hartha sees a sick man and an old man and a dead body for the first time in his life and decides to devote himself to the problem of suffering in his world.

Judaism - The story at the very center of Judaism, is of 400 years of slavery in Egypt. This group of Hebrew slaves, becomes a people whose identity is forever tied to remembering their suffering in Egypt.

All throughout the Old Testament, God says, "because remember you were slaves in Egypt. Do this. Don't do that. Treat people this way. Treat your neighbors this way. Treat foreigners this way...because remember you were slaves, remember your suffering in Egypt."

And **Christians**, you and me we're followers of a Jewish Rabbi. Who spent his life, reaching out to the poorest of the poor, the outcast, the unwelcome, the untouchable...the suffering

And then he, himself, ended up suffering, suffocating on a Roman cross. And out of his suffering, was born a little group of followers that would eventually become the Church.

Our story, is that God, entered our reality and suffered with us, for us.

I'll walk with a God who enters my reality. I'll cry out like Job. I'll ask. I'll question. I'll hang on to a thin thread of trust in this God who suffers with me.

While we do not fully understand suffering. And while Job's story doesn't answer all of the questions surrounding pain and evil and injustice. In his story, we find our own. We hear the Old Testament whispering to you and me, "Ahh, you are that man, and this story is about you!"