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### Session 43

"God's voice thunders in marvelous ways; he does great things beyond our understanding." Job 37:5

**Job-Key verses: 1:8; 27:2-4; 37:5; 42:12**

**Key personalities: Job, Eliphaz, Bilddad, Zophar, Elihu, Satan, Job's family.**

**Timeline:** Perhaps between 2000 – 1500 B.C. Job's date is a mystery and possibly predates or is in the time of the Patriarchs as he is the family priest and has a long life. This is one of the oldest books in the Bible. During this time, the Minoans are in their golden period with indoor bathrooms for the wealthy. Stonehenge is constructed by the Druids; music notes are created by the Syrians; and, glass is created in Mesopotamia. During Abraham's life, the areas were ruled by Egypt and the Pharaohs, cats are domesticated and worshiped, the Sphinx and Great Pyramids are built, and the Bronze Age is in high gear.

**The Book of Job** is about the struggle and suffering of humanity in a sinful world against the backdrop of God's Sovereignty. The central character is Job, a man of faith who had extreme wealth and literally lost it all. He did not deserve his suffering. He also had to deal with the various reactions and obtuse conversations with his friends who do not understand what God was doing. Their thinking is, "God blesses the faithful, so what happens is what you deserve or you sinned." God does bless the faithful, wicked people do prosper and there are exceptions. We are presented with a view of suffering and the bigger plan of God, where the question is not answered; rather, only God knows the 'why'. We are to trust and rely on God's Sovereignty.

**Theme.** The Perseverance of Job. There are so many questions to answer: Why is there suffering? Why do bad things happen to good people? Why does God's faithful suffer? Where is God when life hurts? The simple answer is God is here, He knows, He cares, and life is not about our ideas and comforts or our plans and will; rather, we were created to know God and live for the Lord no matter what comes our way.

**Key Happenings:** What do we do with the challenges of life when things do not go our way?

- *Perseverance / patience of Job*, the theme of this Book, means 'endurance,' as Job went through great sufferings, and he persevered. It is about one's persistence in the face of adversity and confusion, when we can't see what the game plan is or even the light at the end of the tunnel; yet, we trust in God and actively 'hang in' there anyway. By action and of faith, even with our fears, doubts, frustrations, and questions, we can persevere. James uses this phrase to communicate encouragement for our *staying power*, as in "you can do it, too!" When God seems far away and no one seems to care about injustice or your concerns, God is still there caring! He will vindicate you and care for you. So, we can run and fight and do our best in dire times (Job. 42:6-12; James 5:11)!
- *Blameless*. This means that we are at peace with God, and those who are blameless walk according to the Law of the Lord. This comes from our obedience and trust. As Christians, we can have peace with God. We have been purchased by the blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ for our redemption (Job 1:1).
- *Satan* means "the accuser" and is in direct contrast to Jesus who is Our Advocate. Satan is the accuser of those who are righteous. He is a "false accuser," who throws things at other people to accuse, slander, and lead astray. He acts like a prosecuting attorney before God's court to those he knows are innocent. In contrast, Jesus is the Defense Attorney. Satan is the "adversary;" he is the Chief Adversary both to God and to humans. Most likely, Satan no longer is able to go before God and accuse us because he has been thrown out of Heaven. At any result or rule, he does not have sway over a person of faith (1 Chron. 21:1; Job 1:2-12; Job 16; Zech. 3:1-2; Matt. 4:10; 13:39; Luke 22:31; John 13:2; 16:11; Eph. 6:11; Rev. 12:10).
- Job wanted to subpoena God and demand an answer while he receives ill advice from his friends. This advice is like what a lot of Christians offer with quick comebacks--no real help to someone in need.

- *Eliphaz the Temanite*. The first to respond, and probably the oldest, Eliphaz talks with fatherly wisdom from his experiences and theologizes Job's situation without much compassion; he tells Job he got what he deserved. While Eliphaz has good knowledge, he is driven by assumptions and does not have real wisdom. Job is stating his just case and rightly rejects his advice (Job 4:8; 6-7;).
- *Bilbada the Shuhite*. He draws his insight from tradition and logic and also states that Job suffers justly as a result of sin. This is probably why none of them helped him when we can assume Job was generous with them (Job 8:2-4; 9-10).
- *Zophar the Naamathite*. Although he does ask Job to repent, he is also filled with assumptions. Zophar does not analyze or give advice; rather he insults Job. He kicks the man while he is down. He does not consider God may be up to something beyond their limited knowledge (Job 11).
- *Elihu*. He waits patiently, is probably the youngest, and is brash. He attacks Job and the rest of them, too. He thinks it is God's discipline (Job 32:4; 32-37; 37:5).
- *Sin* means to go against God, to miss His mark and thus be separated from Him. We tend to govern our lives by what we want, not always what is best for us. This theme beckons us to seek what God wants. You may think, *Hey, this is my life, and I can do what I want*. Yes, you are right; and, yes, you can. However, God is intimately involved with us. God is no cosmic idea. He is our personal, loving God! So, you see, only an extremely arrogant, prideful, and dim-witted person would say *Yes, I can do it on my own!* God sees it *all*. He has the big picture of how *all* things in life throughout *all* of time and all persons are interwoven in His tapestry of love and redemption. Do not seek to be a person who is a loose thread and liable to be unwoven (Eph. 6:12; James 4: 13-17)!
- *Tested...be found*, refers to a "crucible" for the refining of precious metals resulting in the quality that refinement brings. *Refined* refers to building character and maturity through difficulties, whereas extravagance tends to build only self-righteousness. Testing is compared to sufferings as a "crucible"--a container made from a refractory substance such as graphite or porcelain and used for melting and purifying precious metals (such as gold) at high temperatures to separate impurities so to produce a finer and more valuable material like 14-carat gold is refined into 24-carat gold. We are purified and refined when we go through the effects and substances of life. These things have a purpose. Nothing happens to us without a reason that is meant to teach us and grow us as we work out our faith. This means that we are to trust in Him, not in our wealth or accomplishments. If we trust in what we have done, we are brought to complacency which creates spiritual deadness in both the believer and the church. (Job 23:10; Psalm 12:6; Prov. 17:3; Isa. 43:2; Jer. 11:4; 1 Cor. 4:3-5; 1 Pet. 1:5-7; 4:13; 5:1).
- *Job, did God create evil?* No. It may seem so; but, in Hebrew, this was a parallel literary device to heighten the contrast between good and evil and God's creative power that He delivers us from evil (Job 11:10-12; 28:28; 30:25-27; Isaiah 45:6-7; Matt. 6:13).

**Does God test us?** God does not test us to bring us harm nor does He seek to cause us to fail. Rather, He wants to see if our faith and commitment is real. He brings us into and out of situations where we can learn and grow in faith thus receiving our reward. We can take comfort in trials, as God is ALWAYS Sovereign over them! His purpose is to refine us, form us, mold us, improve us, restore us, grow us, and strengthen us. Trials and testing can also be used to bring us to contemplate our attitudes, mindsets, and deeds so we can seek repentance and wake up to errors, so that we seek Him. He does this much as a loving parent disciplines a child. Other times, God tests to bring about discipline, justice, and judgment. Jews believe that suffering brings atonement, but this is not what this means; rather, faith is a precious commodity to God (Gen. 11:1-f; Deut. 8:2; 13:3; Judg. 2:22; Job. 23:10; Rom. 5:3; James 1: 2-4, 12-16; 1 Pet. 4:17; 5:1-4, 8).

Sometimes, God has to get our attention through adversity. Sometimes, we don't have a willingness to listen. Sometimes, we stop growing. He has to break our pride and reorder our misplaced priorities. The key is how we are able to receive Christ as LORD. Are we able and willing to understand? Sometimes, our willingness and ability to understand does not come until eternity as it was with Job. The key is to trust and know He is in control, He will be there with us carrying us through. It is not about understanding ourselves; this is about understanding Him. Ask Christ to show you His deep hidden treasures, and be willing to listen and grow (1 Peter 1: 3-12; James 5: 7-12).

**What do I do when I am in a trial?** When the storm clouds begin to form, it is not a time to be impatient. This is not a time to deny and ignore it, hoping it will go away. This is a time to seek Christ's face in surrendered devotion and prayer. Use the time to seek the reason. Maybe you made a bad decision. Maybe you followed some bad advice. Perhaps, you have stopped growing—really growing—in faith and practice and service unto the Lord. Maybe you cannot find the reason; Job did not. We do know that God wants our attention. So, if you took a careful look inside yourself, immersed yourself in prayer and sought Godly advice, and still find no reason, please don't get hung up on seeking the reason. Maybe He does not want you to know it, or you are not ready for it. However, in many cases, the reason is in plain sight. We just need to get the distractions of fear, personal will, and expectations out of the way so that we can see it.

- You have a choice: Become better or bitter. (Job 21 :25 Heb 12:15) How can I avoid bitterness? Accept what cannot be changed (Job 11:13,16) Focus on what you still have, not what you have lost (1 Thess. 5:18).
- Remember what is important in life. Guess what? The important things do not include our things and our "stuff". The important things are not our careers, education, looks, toys, power, or status. The important stuff in life? Relationships, not possessions, matter (Luke 12:15; 1 Tim. 6:7).
- Focus on Christ. This is the secret reservoir of strength which we may access completely and fully. This gives us the perseverance in tough times (Phil. 4:13).
- Place your trust and reliance upon Christ; this is where your stability comes from. (Isa. 26:3 Ps.112: 6,7; 125:1)
- Learn to listen. Listen to our Lord through your prayer and devotions. Listen to God-breathed wisdom and advice from the Bible. Seek the advice of wise friends and leaders who love the Lord. This is where our direction comes from (Jer. 29:11).
- God is our Redemption! Because of what He did, we can draw our strength from Him and rest in His protection. Remember, He always helps in times of trouble. If you do not see it, you are not looking (Psalm 46:2).

**What do we do when others are in trials?** Be a church! Pray for them! Help them! We can honor people who have been triumphant in suffering because it is encouraging to us because we have examples. When we witness perseverance in faith, we know we can, too! Yes, this means you! Whatever may be attempting to derail your faith or trying to move you off God's path--spiritual warfare, toxic family members, disgruntled work situations, a debilitating illness--we can carry on because He appropriates us for a purpose; He carries us through!

What are we *not* to do? We are not to make haphazard plans; we are not to forego personal examination or scorn wisdom. There are many passages that exhort us to plan carefully and effectively (this is the purpose of the Wisdom Books). Rather, the point is not to 'do life' without putting God first and foremost! We must be in His process, not ours, because He is personal and involved with us.

The greatest comfort we have as Christians is that our lives, experiences, and opportunities are not happenstance; we have a purpose! We have a God who transcends space, time, and thought, who knows us intimately, and who has a plan for each of us (Acts. 18:21; Rom. 1:10; 15:32; 1 Cor. 4:19; 1 Pet. 3:17).

**Does God want us healthy and rich?** No, it is not important to God. *Blessing* to God is our faith and relationship development and deployment, and *riches* means the receiving of our atonement and our resulting gratitude and service to the Savior. These are far more impacting and effectual! Job challenges the mindset of the "prosperity gospel"; our suffering is not always because of God's lack of favor. Suffering is not always because we lack faith or don't pray enough. God may be at work in alternative ways. Yes, our sin and lack of faith will cause chaos; however, when we are faithful and things are not going well, please stay in prayer and keep the faith playing forward to His glory. Yes, immature and misguided people will attack you as Job's friends attacked him; they do not know much about God and His plan and rely on presumptions and assumptions. We are to be practical, consider our ways: What we are doing, and what does the Lord require of you? Is it self-satisfaction, self-seeking, self-examination or seeking to glorify the Lord by self-surrender to His ways? Instead of confronting, be comforting (Gen. 12:1-3, 15-17; Luke 10:35; 2 Cor. 8:9, 14; Gal. 3:14; Phil. 4:6; 1 Tim. 3:3;; 6:5, 9-11; Heb. 13:5; James 4:13-16)!

**Key Takeaway:** We may not understand our problems or ever get a reason, as Job did not; however, we can still trust in God who loves us and is "caring" us through everything! Do you accept His caring? It is sad how so few Christians, when faced with problems, will really seek and rely on God. It is heartrending how many—or how few--Christians respond to their brothers and sisters in peril and need. They tend to only see their situation and presumptions, cowering in bitterness and anger, even aiming that anger toward God. They do not see that He is, indeed, in control. Thus, many Christians withdraw into isolation, bitterness, and denial, and avoid His true love and plan for them. We have to learn to learn; we have to grow, so we can grow. If not, we stagnate and our circumstances will sink us. We have been given victory! That is what the Christian experience is all about--our victory over sin and despair by what Christ has done on our behalf! If we do not declare the victory, we will only see defeat. Even though we already have the victory, we will be defeated (Psalm 71; 2 Cor. 4:7-12; James 1)!

**The foreshadow of Jesus Christ?** God's Sovereignty trumps our plight, because, *My Redeemer Lives!* Jesus is shown by the Need of His work as Redeemer and Mediator. Jesus is the one who ultimately suffers, ultimately in our place (Job. 9:23, 33; 19:25-27; 33:23-24).

### Questions to Ponder

1. What do you do when the challenges of life come and things do not go our way?
2. Why would some people really rather have a limited, imperfect perspective of life without the perfect, eternal, loving God's insight and plan?
3. Why do you think God never tells Job the 'why' of it all? Would it matter?
4. What happens when we are thinking and living without faith, with only our own perceptions and presumptions in view?
5. When we go through the troubles of life, we can either take shelter in Christ or seek to go it alone in our fears and pride. What do you do? What should you do?
6. When you are under the stresses and hostile occupations of life, what can you do to move away from the stress and only seeing your situation to seeking the improving of your faith?
7. How can knowing that trials have a purpose and reason help you focus away from anger to being willing to learn and grow from them?
8. Do you realize that as you grow in your faith, you become even more precious to God and He will preserve you through trials and life?
9. Why are some Christians obsessed over the 'prosperity gospel'? How is this not biblical?
10. What are the true blessings and riches? How do they echo into eternity? How does this make you feel? How does this strengthen you?
11. What can your church do when people are going through tough times?
12. How can encouragement within a call to action to get with God's plan to help those in need? How would this work?