

## **Job Introduction - Humility and a Sovereign God**

### **Read 1:1-12**

This morning we're beginning a study through the book of Job. I've wanted to preach through Job for many years but I've been a little daunted because it's 42 chapters, I preach verse by verse...you can do the math. So let me just say at the outset we will be going through Job at a faster average than usual. We'll start slow and end slow. But what I want to do is basically summarize the middle chapters.

I think most of you know the book of Job but if you don't here's the gist. Job is the godliest man on the planet - that's God's own assessment of Job. Satan then says that the only reason Job worships God is because God has blessed him with health and money and children. So God says Satan can take all those things away. So Job's children are all killed, all of his wealth is destroyed, and he is left with boils all over his skin. And Job has no idea that God and Satan have had this discussion and that this is why this calamity is happening. That's chapters 1-2.

Chapters 3-37 is Job going back and forth with 4 friends - Zophar, Bildad, Eliphaz and Elihu - who all say that these things are because of Job's sin or his children's sin. All they know is that Job was a godly guy who was very well off and now it's all been taken from him and that must mean he's got something wrong with him. "What righteous person has ever suffered?" They throw in his face. They have no idea about the conversation between God and Satan. Meanwhile Job defends himself to them and becomes more and more ornery and self-righteous. That's 35 chapters of back and forth.

The last 5 chapters are God rebuking Job for his demands that God answer his questions - along with God again blessing Job with children and wealth. Job - as far as we know - never knows about the conversation between God and Satan and never is told why this all happened. That's the gist of the book.

So my plan today is to give you an overview of the book along with some background information at the end. Then we're going to work our way through the first couple of chapters slowly. But for the middle of the book what I want to do is spend a week summarizing the argument of each one of his friends.

Again, if you've read Job recently you remember that Job complains, then Eliphaz responds, Job replies, Bildad responds, Job replies to that, then Zophar gets a shot and they go round and round like that for 35 chapters. Much of their arguments are similar. So what I want to do is summarize all of what Eliphaz says one week, then spend a week on Bildad, Zophar, Elihu and then Job. I might tweak that a little bit, but for the most part I want to summarize what they are saying otherwise we'd be stuck listening to the same stuff for 2 years. I think we can give the book a lot of justice by this format.

And then we'll dive in to the last 5 chapters at a regular pace.

So here's what I'm asking from you if you want to get the most out of Job: I want you to be reading through Job as we go along. Either read the whole thing through at the beginning or read a few chapters every day to get a feel for what's going on. I think if you do that we will walk away from this with a much richer experience.

Why Job? As I said, I've always wanted to preach through Job. And I read through Job during the initial stay at home orders and it struck me how relevant the book is in the midst of suffering. Whether you're suffering from the disease or suffering from the effects of the government restrictions - there's a lot of suffering. And that's life: life is filled with suffering of one kind or another and Job helps us to understand suffering from a biblical perspective.

If you think about it, our whole faith revolves around suffering. The suffering death of Jesus Christ leading to his resurrection and ascension into heaven where he will come one day and eliminate all suffering for his people. Yet for those who don't believe in him their eternal fate is suffering. Suffering surrounds the Christian life and Job helps us with how we should understand that.

The whole book is about suffering. Interestingly, after reading Job, I actually used Job to comfort people as well as evangelize. I was talking to a guy who said he had read through the Bible several times while in prison but didn't believe because it hadn't changed him or done anything to alleviate his suffering. His main complaint

and objection to Christianity was, "I tried doing the Bible thing and my life is still filled with suffering." Welcome to life, buddy. We're not promised happiness and lack of suffering in this life. The most godly people in the Bible suffer.

All the apostles suffered. All the prophets suffered. The people of Israel suffered as slaves in Egypt. They suffered as slaves in Babylon. The early Christians suffered so much that Tertullian once said that the blood of the saints is the seed of the Church. The more you mow us down the more we grow. Suffering is often the means by which the gospel message is advanced.

So Job, which is arguably the oldest book in the Bible, is also the one book that is continually relevant because it deals with how we are to suffer in a godly way.

So let me just give you the gist of the whole book: You will suffer in life. That's a promise.

Whether you're the godliest person on the planet or not, you will suffer. When you suffer - and you will - you'll be tempted to ask God "why"? "God, why am I suffering the way I am?" And the answer is: God owes you no explanations. He has no need to explain your suffering in this life, and there's no promise that he'll explain why you suffered once you're in heaven. I've heard people say "God will explain it all to us once we're in heaven." There's no verse that says that. We have no promise of explanations in heaven.

God owes us no explanations. But you know what we owe God even in the midst of incredible suffering? Worship. Here's Job after losing all 10 of his kids and all his wealth. **Read 1:13-22**

We'll go back over this in more detail. But the thing I want you to see for now is simply that this is the proper response to calamity. The Lord gives, the Lord takes - praise be to the Lord. Whatever calamity and tragedy you're facing or have faced should be met with worship to God. I don't mean we go sing silly song in repossessed to grief. This isn't "Don't worry, be happy" or "Hakuna Matata." I mean a humble recognition that God is God and we are not.

That's not to minimize the suffering. That's not say the pain doesn't matter. We're not talking about "just looking on the bright side" or "there's a silver lining" down the road. Some of you have suffered some tragedies in life that are far beyond anything I can comprehend. Job lost 10 kids in 1 day. I can't comprehend losing 10 kids in a tragedy.

And even if we think, "Well, at the end of the book he gets 10 more." Kids aren't trading cards! It's not like you lose a couple and get some back on EBay. These were 10 precious lives created in God's image that were taken away when a wind storm demolished the house they were all in.

**Look** at Job's sorrow. **Read 3:1-10**

You know what he's saying? "I wish I had never been born." His grief is so great he is longing for death. His grief and sorrow is so great that if somehow he could go back in time and erase everything - all the joy and blessing and happiness - he would because the grief right now is so oppressive.

And Job's going to spend 35 chapters going round and round with 4 friends about why this happened. He calls them miserable comforters - and they really are the worst friends. And they provoke him to sin; he gets pretty worked up. I'd say he even falls into sin. **Look** over at **23:1-7**. Here Job wants to put God on trial and get an answer. **Read**

"I'll go find God and give him an ear full and he will answer for what he's done!" That's not how God works. When you read through the book, the Lord does appear to Job. But it's not to answer any questions as though God has been subpoenaed to Job's courtroom.

**Look** over at **38**. Here God appears to Job. Notice who's asking all the questions. **Read 1-15**

This goes on for 2 full chapters. **Read 39:1-4; 40:1-5**

I shut my mouth. Notice that God wasn't coddling Job. You'd think here's this man who lost 10 kids, has horrible friends, has a nagging wife, is covered in boils that he has to scrape off with a broken pot - you'd think maybe God would be gentle.

But God's heard 35 chapters of complaining and presumption. And he basically responds by saying: You know, I've got a trillion things I'm taking care of - including every detail of your life - and I'm weaving them all together in a perfect plan for my glory. You can't possibly comprehend all I've got going on.

Were you around when I created the heavens? Or when I planned where the oceans would end? Are you the one who keeps the earth rotating so that the stars come out on time? Those galaxies that are billions of light years away - do you keep those together? What about the animals? Do you create life? Because all life only exists because I keep it together and sustain it. Do you know when and where all the goats on the planet have babies?

Have you even thought about the ostrich?! No I didn't think so.

This is God's point: suffering is hard and tragic. But God doesn't owe us an explanation. What **we owe him** is trust and worship.

And what's amazing is that Job was so far out of line that even when he says I put my hand over my mouth - God's not done. **Read 40:6-14**

You know when your kids really make you angry and you're upset and they apologize? But you're not done chewing them out yet? That's what God's doing to Job. God goes on for 2 more chapters! Finally he rests his case in 42 and this is what Job says. **Read 42:1-6**

Job didn't even get one question out for God. God carpet bombs Job with over 100 questions about everything from creation to nature to astronomy to heaven to hell. None of which he could possibly answer. His only acceptable response is to repent in dust and ashes.

I've had some very hard things in life. You've had some very hard things in life. If you haven't, just wait. We live in a fallen world and that depravity affects us sooner or later.

We need to be very careful about raising our fist to God and demanding answers for our tragedies and suffering. Our suffering is just one part of a trillion things God has going on at any given moment in time. And we can't see the bigger picture.

It'd be like trying to explain the technical details of a nuclear power plant to a mosquito. I don't owe mosquitos an explanation for nuclear power plants because they couldn't possibly understand it. God doesn't owe us an explanation for how he orchestrates all creation because we couldn't possibly understand it even if he did try to explain it.

Part of God's answer to Job is that Job has a very small view of God. Job thinks God is some sort of mid level control operator who accidentally hit some wrong buttons on his life and he wants to talk to the supervisor. That's how we often treat God. "What's he doing up there!?"

No, God is infinitely greater than that. Our view of God is often like Job's view. We think God is small. No, God is weaving all history and every atom of the universe together in a grand design that will bring him ultimate glory for all eternity. And though our suffering is real and deep - even that has a purpose in God's design. Even if we don't understand how.

And let me caution us from simply saying "Well, you went through this tragedy to help other people in tragedy." Yes, that might be true. But that's only one facet of how tragedy is used by God for his glory. There may be hundreds of ways tragedy is used and we have no idea how it all fits in. We don't believe in a fatalistic world view where whatever happens happens and we are indifferent to it.

We do believe God is sovereign and that calamity never comes to a city unless the Lord has done it, but that's not to say God is evil. It's also not to say that we should just get over it.

Part of our response is humility. That's what God is calling for. God is supremely and infinitely sovereign. And our response many times is just to say: You know, God's ways are not my ways. God is so infinitely greater than I can ever imagine, so I don't know why this happened. But I do know that God is good. He's sovereign and he's good and therefore I can trust him with joy. Our God is worth praising even if everything in life is stripped away from us.

So that's the gist of the book. And we're going to wrestle with a lot of things in the book of Job. We're going to wrestle with the problem of evil. How can a good God, who is all knowing and all powerful let evil exist?

We're going to wrestle with the role of Satan in calamity. We're going to look at suicide. We're going to talk about counseling. Self pity. We're going to talk about dinosaurs. We'll be talking about taking the Bible out of context. There's a lot we'll look at.

In the mean time know that the triune God of the Bible is on the throne. He reigns. And he reigns even over suffering. He is not evil, he doesn't take suffering lightly, his own Son suffered long the cross for the sins of his people. But our God is so great that he can even use suffering for our good and his glory.

**Pray**