

Devotion: August 12, 2020

Job 1:1, 2:1-10

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 ¹ *On another day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them to present himself before him.* ² *And the Lord said to Satan, "Where have you come from?"* Satan answered the Lord, "From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it."

³ *Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason."*

⁴ *"Skin for skin!"* Satan replied. "A man will give all he has for his own life." ⁵ *But now stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face."*

⁶ *The Lord said to Satan, "Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life."*

⁷ *So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head.* ⁸ *Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes.*

⁹ *His wife said to him, "Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!"*

¹⁰ *He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"*

In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.

As I read through Job, again for the umpteenth time, I began to wonder where that old adage: "He/She has the patience of Job?" Then I learned that Job's "patience" comes from the letter of James in which the author says, "*You have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy*" (James 5:11). Oddly enough, the word "patience" doesn't appear anywhere in the book of Job itself.

No matter. I have always been taught that the patience of Job enabled him to endure suffering as he kept at the same time his faith in God. He took the long view in life, looking well beyond his horrible losses, and because of this he was able, eventually, to experience the compassion and mercy of God.

But is this true to the story of Job?

Not exactly.

Job does not bear his affliction calmly, as a patient person would; instead, he cries out, "*I loathe my life; I will give free utterance to my complaint; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul*" (10:1).

So, is patience a virtue? Is it always a virtue to be patient? Aren't there some things in life that should, by their very nature, drive us nuts? ...

Should we be patient in the present situation with the Covid virus? Or when we hear, for example, statistics like this: 500,000 children in Brazil, 400,000 children in India, 200-850,000 children in Thailand, 100,000 children in Taiwan, 200,000 children in Nepal, and according to UNICEF estimates, somewhere between 100-300,000 children in North America involved in the sex trade. That's over two million children around the world. Should we just sit back when we hear this? I know we hear horrendous statistics all the time. But patience in the face of those things which are truly evil? Truly horrible? Is that a virtue?

There are many life-changing lessons in the story of Job, but patience is not one of them. It is more important to focus on several other messages, messages about the nature of suffering and the importance of faithfulness to God. These are not clichés like “the patience of Job,” but are, instead, insights that leave us with something to truly think about.

For me, the book of Job makes it clear that not all human suffering is deserved — it is not necessarily a punishment for a life of beer, brawls, fornication, impurity, passion and greed. Job is a righteous man, described by God as being “*a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil*” (1:8).

And yet, he loses his property to raiding Sabeans and Chaldeans, and his sons and daughters die in a natural disaster (1:13-19). As if this is not painful enough, he comes down with painful sores that cover him from head to foot (2:7). Job is an absolute mess, leaving onlookers to wonder, “What did he do to deserve this?”

The answer, of course, is, “Nothing.” Jesus himself knew this, and observed a number of years later that God “*sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous*” (Matthew 5:45). We should never be quick to conclude that anyone deserves the suffering they experience ... anyone, including ourselves

So can we scream and yell at God, for all this unjustness? Job did. Lately I have. “*I will not restrain my mouth,*” shouts Job. “*I will complain in the bitterness of my soul*” (7:11). There is nothing wrong with offering up a passionate and honest complaint, as long as we direct our complaining to God and God alone. What saves Job is that he remains faithful to God, always demanding that God hear him and take him seriously and respond to his concerns.

The same can be true for us. Like Job, our challenge is to accept both the bad and the good, and to remain in close contact with God through every twist and turn of life, never turning from him and never giving up on him. Ultimately, we'll find that it is an honest and intimate relationship with God that saves us, and puts us in a position to discover true serenity and peace.

Lord, you laid the earth's foundations. You placed its cornerstone. While the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy, you set limits for the sea and said, “This far and no further!” You gave orders to the morning and showed the dawn its place. You molded the earth until it took shape. You alone know the springs of the sea. You alone comprehend the vastness of the universe. You alone know the laws of heaven. Lord, give wisdom to our hearts and understanding to our minds. Amen.