

## ***Incredible Heroes of the Faith – Job – Job 42:1-10***

I can't prove it absolutely, but my guess is that the most asked question throughout history, regardless of culture, has been this one: Why do bad things happen to good people? And that question is certainly at the heart of the life of the man that we'll look at this morning – Job.

When we go through difficult times in our lives, that is almost always the first question we ask, whether we do that out loud, or whether we just think it to ourselves. But as Job learned, and hopefully as we'll learn this morning, the reason it's so hard to find an answer to that question is because it's not the right question to be asking in the first place.

The opening paragraph of the book of Job portrays Job as a very religious man. He is described as upright and blameless and he consistently goes through the religious ritual of making sacrifices for his children in case they have sinned. But there appears to be something that is missing in Job's life – any kind of personal relationship with God. You'll notice that in these first five verses, God is mentioned twice. And in both cases the underlying Hebrew word is Elohim, which is the generic name for God. It is the same word that is frequently translated "god" – with a little "g" throughout the Old Testament. So while Job is religious and has some concept of a deity, that is about as far as his relationship with God seems to go at that point in his life.

With that in mind, skip ahead with me all the way to the last chapter of Job – chapter 42. Something has obviously changed in Job's life from when we first saw him back in chapter 1. First of all, He now refers to God as "the Lord", which translates the Hebrew word "YHWH" – the covenant name of God. Job approaches the Lord here in complete humility. He acknowledges God's power and control, and he confesses his previous disrespect for God. And then in verse 5, he proclaims the message that we need to take away from the book of Job today that I would paraphrase like this: When I go through trials, what matters is who I know not what I know.

In other words, trying to find the answer to why I'm suffering is really futile because the only lasting relief that I am going to find in the midst of my trials is to not just know about God, but to know Him personally.

So how did Job go from the religious man who knew about God in chapter 1, to the man who really knows God in chapter 42? Let's briefly review Job's story.

After the introduction in the first 5 verses of the book, we're given a glimpse into the heavenly realms where God has a conversation with Satan. Satan, whose name appropriately means "the accuser", claims that Job is only religious because God has blessed him. So God, knowing from the beginning that Job is going to pass the test, gives Satan permission to attack Job. But He puts clear limits on exactly what Satan is allowed to do. So Satan kills Job's children and destroys all his wealth. But Job refuses to charge God with wrong and he worships God.

So Satan returns to God again and this time gets permission to afflict Job with sores literally from head to foot. This time Mrs. Job challenges Job and encourages him to curse God and die. But again, Job refuses to charge God with wrong.

At that point, Job's three friends hear of his predicament and they all came together to comfort Job. And for seven days they just sit with Job without uttering a word. Then, Job opens his mouth and laments the day of his birth. And then for the next 28 chapters, we read the conversation that occurs between Job and his three friends. Since we obviously don't have time to read that section, alone look at it in detail, let me summarize for you the approach that each of his three friends takes here:

1. Eliphaz - He claims to speak absolute truth and is a proponent of the traditional theory of retribution - God punishes the sinner and rewards the righteous.

2. Bildad – the firm traditionalist. Like Eliphaz, Bildad has an unbending allegiance to the traditional idea that all suffering is a result of sin. But because he is also observant of Job's situation, he takes things even further. He adds to Job's suffering by proclaiming that Job's children died because they, too, were guilty of sin and warns Job that unless he repents, he will suffer the same fate.
3. Zophar – the rash dogmatist. He was a straight talker who believed in speaking the truth, but he certainly didn't do that in love.

But Job is not comforted at all by his three friends, as he makes clear with his own words: "I have heard many such things; miserable comforters are you all. (Job 16:2 ESV)

But in chapter 32, a young man named Elihu, whose name means "He is my God", appears on the scene. Because he is younger than the others, he has been listening to this entire conversation, waiting to speak until the others are finished. His discourse continues all the way through the end of chapter 37 without even one interruption by Job.

Elihu does say some of the same things the three friends said and there are certainly some things in his speech that are hard to understand. And he is no doubt tough on Job, perhaps harder than he should have been, possibly because he was angry with Job and his three friends. But Elihu does definitely present something new in his discourse. He disputes both the argument of the three friends that Job's trials were a result of his sin as well as Job's assertion that God's actions were merely arbitrary.

According to Elihu, God intervenes in the life of man in two ways – through dreams and visions, and through suffering. And in both, God's purpose is to save, not to punish. Elihu does not picture God as an angry judge, but rather as a merciful Savior. Elihu goes on to explain that sometimes God uses suffering to reveal and root out sin in a righteous person. So affliction should make even a righteous person sensitive to the sin in his life and lead him to hate that sin and repent.

But that still doesn't provide Job with a satisfactory answer to his question, because, as Job is about to find out, that's not even the right question to ask. But the greatest contribution Elihu makes is that he prepares Job to listen to God in the last part of the book. Job has been wanting to talk to God directly ever since chapter 9 and Elihu encourages Job to listen to the voice of God that he is about to hear. So while he has his faults, it appears that Elihu generally has things right, which is why he is not condemned along with Job's three friends at the end of the book.

So beginning in chapter 38, God speaks to Job, asking a series of questions that are intended to remind Job of the fact that God is infinitely powerful and that His ways and thoughts are higher than Job's. Job is immediately humbled in the presence of God. So when God pauses for a moment and challenges Job to answer Him, Job basically says, "I'll just shut up and listen." So God continues to speak to Job.

It is only after hearing from God that Job realizes that he has been asking the wrong questions all along and that he finally came to the conclusion that we saw earlier: When I go through trials, what matters is who I know not what I know.

Job no longer is focused on why he has suffered. After hearing from God, Job is satisfied with the fact that instead of just knowing about God, that as a result of what he had gone through, he now knew God in a much more intimate, personal way, and he would choose to just be content with that. He was no longer obsessed with having to know why as long as he knew God.

So, in our text today, God rebukes Job's three friends because they have not spoken what is right and instructs them to make an offering. And then Job prayed for his friends, asking that God not deal with them according to their folly. And God accepted Job's prayer.

Job had passed the test, just as God knew he would when He gave Satan permission to torment Job. And once again, God demonstrated His grace and mercy by restoring Job. Although Mrs. Job is not mentioned, Job does have seven more sons and three more daughters, just as he had before. God not only restored all Job's flocks, but he doubled the number that Job had possessed before. And Job lived another 140 years as a very blessed man. We need to be careful with how we use this epilogue. This is not in any way a promise by God that He is always going to bless us like that when we endure trials. When I go through trials, what matters is who I know not what I know. That truth obviously has some important implications for us when we face trials.

But, I want to approach this from a different angle and close by discussing: How I should comfort others in their trials. As we think about how Job's friends tried to comfort him in his trials, we can see both some things we should do and some things we shouldn't do as we try to comfort others in their trials. Let's begin with a "don't":

**DON'T: Preach**

To at least some extent, all three of Job's friends tried to preach to him. As we saw earlier, at least some of what they claimed to know about God wasn't even true. But even what was true wasn't helpful at all for Job. When others are going through trials, the last thing they need is for us to tell them what we think we know about God or to try and speak on God's behalf.

**DO: Be present**

Here is where we have to give Job's friends some credit. And from what we read here, it may very well be that Job got more comfort from them for the seven days that they just remained with him without saying a word, than he did in the entire time they opened their mouths.

When I first became a pastor, I often felt ill-equipped to minister to people who were going through difficulties because I felt like my role was to give them answers in the midst of their problems. But what I've come to realize is that most of the time, what people need is not answers, but merely someone to be there with them during those times.

**• Point the other person to God**

I think this is why Elihu was never rebuked by God. Although he did preach to some extent, what he primarily did was to point Job to God and to encourage him to listen when God spoke. While others don't need our preaching when they are suffering, what they might very well need is for us to come alongside them and say, "I sure don't have all the answers, but let's look at God's Word together because He does have the answers". And we can also point the other person to God by praying with them, which leads us to the last thing we should do...

**• Pray**

If it is true that what people need most in their trials is to know God, then it seems to me that my prayers should reflect that. Far too often, it seems that our prayers revolve only around asking God to remove the other person from their trials – to heal their sickness, or to fix their finances, or to change their circumstances. And sometimes those kinds of prayers may very well be appropriate.

But what if we began praying that, in the midst of those trials, the other person would come to know God better? What if we prayed that they would spend more time in God's Word and in prayer, that they would be sensitive to the Holy Spirit as He speaks into their lives? If it is true that what matters most in trials is who I know and not what I know, shouldn't that be reflected in how I pray?

When I go through trials, what matters is who I know not what I know. We live in the midst of a culture where a lot of people are hurting. And what all of us need is not some program or even answers to our questions. What we need is a relationship with God through faith in Jesus..... Ultimately that is the only thing that will sustain any of us in the midst of our trials. Amen