

Sermon Preached at Grace Community Church (EPC)
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"Who Am I?" [Part Two]
Excerpts from the Book of Job

Question: "How do you know when you're getting old? It's when "...you try to straighten out the wrinkles in your socks only to find you're not wearing any!"

Despite certain drawbacks there are definite advantages to being old. The lines and wrinkles which inevitably come with age, are visible signs that you've accumulated a wealth of knowledge. At age seventy-eight, retired five-star General Douglas MacArthur wrote in his memoirs: "Age is relative. It is not just the numbers of years you've lived. People grow old by deserting their ideals." He quipped, "Years may wrinkle the skin, but giving up interest wrinkles the soul." ¹

Yes, the last chapters of our life can be our best. Your final song can be your greatest composition. Someone once said, "God's oldest have always been among His choicest!" I recently came across this sobering reminder: "Never regret growing old. It's a privilege denied to many."

Speaking of old, the account of Job is the oldest book in the Bible; long before Moses recorded the Pentateuch. It became part of the Ketuvim or "Writings". Having no connection with the other writings (i.e., the Psalms, Proverbs, the Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes), it ultimately rests on its own merit. Even secular literary critics agree that Job is among the world's most magnificent dramatic pieces.

Not only is Job the oldest manuscript, it was the first to tackle what has plagued mankind since the dawn of recorded history, which is this: "good vs. evil". It underscores the paradoxical question: "If God is righteous, then why did He allow evil to exist?"

Within the framework of theology, it's called 'theodicy'. It's the discipline which examines the existence of evil. Yet, it also serves to vindicate

¹ Lucado, *He Still Moves Stones* pg. 129+

God's divine attributes, most notably: His holiness, righteousness and omnipotence.

"Is God righteous?" Indeed, He is! David exclaims: "***The Lord is righteous in all His ways and kind in all His deeds***" [Psalm 145:17]. Another psalmist writes: "***Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; Yes, our God is compassionate***" [Psalm 116:5]. Daniel echoes these same sentiments: "***... For the Lord our God is righteous with respect to all His deeds which He has done...***" [Daniel 9:14].

But, if God is righteous, and evil persists, then one must logically assume that God cannot be sovereign. To counter such thinking, the psalmist writes: "***For God spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast***" [Psalm 33:9]. Another psalm says, "***...our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases***" [Psalm 115:3]. In fact, Job himself exclaimed: "***I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted***" [Job 42:2].

So, if God is righteous and sovereign, then why would He have allowed evil to exist? Let's be clear! God is neither the '*author*', nor the '*instigator*' of evil. However, God *did* allow its introduction.

"For all its peculiarities and unevenness, the Bible has a simple storyline. God made man. Man rejected God. God continues to woo mankind back to Him." ² So, it is man's fault? "Yes" and "No." Yes, man is at fault for failing to trust God completely. We did not take Him at His Word! But evil existed *before* the fall of man. The former anointed cherub, Lucifer, was cast out of heaven by willfully committing the sin of pride [Isaiah 14:11, 12; Ezekiel 28:11-19]. Only later did Satan deceive Eve. And by so doing, she enticed Adam to also eat of the fruit of the 'tree of Good and Evil'.

But such was not the case with the man named Job (also called Jashub). Scholars believe he lived during the time of Abraham. Our story begins: "***There was a man in the land of Uz...***" The precise location is unknown. However, Bible scholars believe it was in proximity to the east of Palestine, near Arabia and Edom [Jeremiah 25:20; Lamentations 4:21]. We're told that: "***... his name was Job who was blameless in the eyes of God.***" This is not to

² Lucado, *A Gentle Thunder* pg. 27+

suggest that Job was sinless. For Job admits he was a sinner. However, he was a man of integrity who abided by high moral principles. In chapter 1, verse 1, it says: ***“Job was upright, fearing God, and turning away from evil.”***

As the story unfolds: JOB FIRST CONTENDS WITH HIMSELF
(repeat).

The name Job is derived from the Hebrew word for *“persecution,”* thus meaning the ‘persecuted one’. It might also have come from an Arabic word meaning *“repent,”* thus Job bore the name the ‘repentant one’.³

Job was very wealthy and highly respected. But his good fortune was about to take a tragic turn. Three tumultuous events occurred on the same day. He was told that his beasts of burden (500 oxen and 500 donkeys) were seized by a raiding party of Sabeans (descendants of Abraham by his concubine and wife, Keturah, who gave birth to six sons). They then slew his servants.

Job was then told that a fire came down from out of heaven and consumed his sizeable herds of sheep (7,000) along with their shepherds. While this news was still breaking, Job learned that a band of Chaldeans, a semi-nomadic people from the Arabian desert, stole all of Job’s camels (3,000) and put to death by the sword all his servants.

Before Job could begin processing the loss of his entire holdings, another messenger informed him that a mighty wind blew down the walls of his oldest son’s house, killing all of his children (seven sons and three daughters)!

In one swell swoop, Job lost...*everything!* His entire livelihood, along with his progeny, were taken from him. In utter despair, Job tore his robes, shaved his head, fell to the ground, and prayed to God: ***“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.”*** Even so, in the aftermath of these horrific events, Job neither sinned, nor did He curse God.

³ Dr. John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Nashville: Word Bibles, 1997) pg. 693

As if this wasn't enough, Job was stricken with a terrible disease, which was excruciating painful. Grief-stricken, Job laments: *"Let the day perish on which I was born..."* [Job 3:2, 3]. *"Why did I not die at birth?...I would have laid down and been quiet; I would have slept and been at rest."* [Job 3:11, 13]. Job mournfully cries out: *"For what I fear has come upon me, and what I dread has befallen me. I am not at ease, nor am I quiet...I am not at rest, but turmoil comes."* [Job 3:25, 26].

Job finds himself asking, *"Who Am I?"* and why has evil taken hold of me? Who can explain these unforeseen calamities? Job utters: *"My soul is restless. There is no peace within me!"*

But Job was fortunate to have three close companions. Friends whom he could confide in. But then, all too soon: **JOB CONTENDS WITH HIS FRIENDS** (repeat).

Upon their arrival, Job's physical features had changed so dramatically that they did not recognize him. They wept bitterly, tore their robes, heaped dust upon their heads, and looked heavenward. And for the next seven days and seven nights, they spoke not a word; for Job's grief was great!

Could we be as fortunate to have such friends? Oh, if only Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar had remained silent. They came to offer him comfort and support, but in due course they started criticizing Job unmercifully. His friends had a legalistic bent towards their religious beliefs. In three series of dialogues each friend surmised that Job must have deserved these misfortunes. Obviously, God brought a curse upon their friend Job. They insisted, "If only Job would admit his guilt, perhaps God would show pity and rectify matters."

But Job knew better. He was underserving of such cruel punishment. Job gazed upon his three friends as if to ask: *"Who are you? Don't you get it? I have no unconfessed sins! There must be another explanation!"* In response to their rhetoric, Job exclaimed: *"As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth"* [Job 19:25].

Later, another man appeared. A much younger man named Elihu who argued that afflictions sometimes do occur through no fault of the victim. God sometimes purifies us (e.g., the *'Refiner's fire'*) for the sole purpose of bringing

us closer to Him. Elihu went on to explain that suffering can be purposeful. It can even be beneficial!

Looking for a plausible explanation: JOB CONTENDS WITH GOD (repeat).

Job had no choice but to turn to God. Which, incidentally, is precisely where God wants us to be! When we're at the end of our rope, God will throw us a life-preserver! Although Job raises a myriad of questions, it all boils down to: "*Why God have You remained silent?*" "*What have I done to deserve this?*"

Oddly, God never explains that Satan had asked God's permission to disrupt Job's life. Instead, God poses a series of questions to His suffering servant. He asks: "*Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?*" [Job 38:4]. "*Have you ever in your life commanded the morning, and caused the dawn to know its place, that it might take hold of the ends of the earth...?*" [Job 38:12, 13]. "*Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Let him who reproves God, answer it.*" [Job 40:2].

In the final analysis, "It's one thing to suffer for doing wrong. It's something else entirely to suffer for doing what is right. But it does happen! When storm clouds gather, it washes away the naive assumption that if I do right, I will never suffer."⁴

In the closing chapters, God takes to task Job's three friends. He severely chastens them for having judged Job so harshly. By way of penance, Job's three friends offered up burnt offerings unto the Lord.

At the close of this book, God mercifully restores all of Job's fortunes...*twofold!* God even endowed Job with another seven sons and three daughters (young maidens who were the fairest in all the land). Job lived for another 140 years. Long enough to see his sons and grandsons grow up; four generations in all.

So, what can we learn from this biblical epic? It involves much more than God's restoration of Job. It serves to remind us that we, too, can be restored. "The God who spoke, still speaks. The God who forgave, still

⁴ Max Lucado, *A Gentle Thunder* pg. 61+

forgives. The God who came, still comes. He comes into *our* world. He comes into *your* world. He comes to do what you cannot do for yourself.”⁵

Let us pray...

⁵ Max Lucado, *He Still Moves Stones* pg. 351