

No Silver Lining in Sight

Job 1:13-22

Introduction

On November 1, 1755, an earthquake rocked Lisbon, Portugal. It is considered the most far-reaching and well-known natural disaster in modern history. The only exception worldwide would be the tsunami of 2004, which swept away coastal villages from Southeast Asia to Indian and Thailand. Other disasters might have been worse than the Lisbon earthquake, but none were so widely discussed, with such profound ramifications.

Ironically, the earthquake hit on All Saints' Day, when churches were crowded with worshippers. We might think that those who were in a church building would be spared. In fact, when the first shock waves were felt, many ran to take shelter in the great cathedrals, joining thousands of others who, on that day with their priests, were taking mass.

Eyewitnesses said that the crowds had the terror of death on their faces, and when the second great shock began, priests and parishioners alike began to scream, calling out to God for mercy. When it was over, almost every church in Lisbon was rubble, and the people inside, crushed to death.

Fires immediately broke out across the city. Havoc was then followed by a tsunami tearing ships from their anchors and drowning hundreds of people.

Tens of thousands of people lost their lives – and it did not seem to matter whether they were religious or rebellious, educated or illiterate, wealthy or poor. When it was over, seventy-five percent of the city had been reduced to rubble.

All throughout Europe, opinions began to weigh in.

Some believed the earthquake was a judgment from God – similar to the belief of the Mayor of New Orleans who made headlines in 2006 when he said that Hurricane Katrina was a sign that, “God was mad at America.”ⁱ

Others said that the earthquake was a sign of God's mercy, since Lisbon deserved much worse.

Many believed that God was somehow trying to communicate that there was a world beyond this one – a world that could give meaning to the unpredictable and haphazard life on earth.

Sermons on the earthquake were preached for years afterward.

Some historians have even said that the revolution in France and the age of the Wesleyan revivals in England came out of this catastrophe in Portugal.ⁱⁱ

In our next session, I want to specifically address some questions that often arise today; such as, “What role does God play in natural disasters like earthquakes and floods and storms? Does He permit them or actually perform them? Is He trying to tell us something or not?”

Today, however, I want to focus on the primary observation as it relates to Job as he experiences:

- an earthquake of unexpected suffering;
- a thunderstorm of unexplained sorrow;
- the billowing waves of unanticipated reversals in life.

These are the most difficult tests of faith a believer may ever encounter. Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in the saga of Job's suffering.

We have already discovered some unsettling truths. Let me reword them in three ways:

1. **Job's faith will not separate him from suffering – his faith initiated it.**
2. **Job's faith will not relieve his agony – his faith caused it.**ⁱⁱⁱ

It is no wonder that prosperity preachers and teachers must ignore the implications of the book of Job. They promise that if you watch your p's and q's, mind your spiritual manners, give God everything you can, and trust Him with everything else, then God will hang a "DO NOT DISTURB" sign on the gate that surrounds your life – and you can expect to skate your way into heaven, for the most part, trouble free.

However, the conversation between God and Satan that we listened in on earlier in Job, began with God saying, "Have you considered My servant Job? He's righteous and upright – he reverences Me and restrains from practicing sin."

Satan responded by basically accusing God of buying Job off. He said, in effect, "You've got him on the heavenly payroll – he behaves and You bless him. Job is righteous because he's rich. Take away his fortunes and just see what happens to his faith."

This is, at the very outset, the disturbing thing about this book. Let me put it another way – a third way:

3. **Job's godly life will not protect him from pain – his faith set him up for it.**

Even the most optimistic Christians among us will say, "Yea, but just wait – this is a great cloud of suffering alright, but it has a huge silver lining. I've read the last chapter! It isn't that bad!"

This reminds me of Bill Walton, the sports announcer and former NBA basketball star who once said, "I learned a long time ago that minor surgery is when they do the operation on someone else."^{iv}

Let me encourage you not to run to the end of the book. In fact, even though you know Job's children will die and he will have more children later, just remember he will never get these children back.

Job will experience this suffering with no silver lining in sight. There is no quick answer from God; no insight or reason from on high. The clouds simply move in and the storm erupts.

Let us work our way through Job 1:13-22 as if we were reading it for the first time; as if we were there to hear the messengers and watch the reaction

of Job. A four-fold devastation is about to occur that will literally wipe Job out.

Job's Devastation

Turn to Job chapter 1. We will hear from several messengers who bring devastating news to Job.

1. Messenger number 1.

Look at Job 1:13-15.

Now on the day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house,

a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them,

"and the Sabeans attacked and took them. They also slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you."

Bandits from the kingdom of Sheba in southern Arabia, whose queen will one day visit Solomon, have come to steal and then eliminate any witnesses who can turn them in.^v

This messenger, gasping for breath, says to Job, "I am the only one who made it out alive!"

2. Messenger number 2.

Before Job even has a chance to hear the last part of the last sentence, Job 1:16 informs us,

While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you."

Perhaps this was a lightning storm that swept into the region and continued to strike the ground. It must have been incredible, given the fact that Job owned 7,000 sheep. The devastation must have been unbelievable.

Notice that the messenger says the fire came from God. In other words, it came from above where God supposedly reigns. If anything, this would only have added to the shock of this particular messenger's tale.

Note also, that the first tragedy was from the hand of bandits; the second from the hand of God.

3. Messenger number 3.

While Job is still reeling from the second messenger, Job 1:17 says,

While he was still speaking, another also came and said, “The Chaldeans formed three bands and made a raid on the camels and took them and slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you.”

This is yet another; a third message of stunning loss and cruel death.

“Job, the Chaldeans, the fierce warriors from northern Mesopotamia, have swept down and stolen 3,000 camels and killed anything else that breathed. I alone escaped to tell you what happened.”

Job reels under the staggering loss of his business, his fortune, and his work force. He considers for a split second the graves that will dot his land; the widows and orphaned children of the servants.

One author wrote, “Perhaps Job thought to himself, ‘At least I’ve got my kids.’”^{vi}

4. Messenger number 4.

Interrupting Job’s thought, “I’ve been spared my family,” another messenger plunges in, fighting back the tears, in Job 1:18-19,

“Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother’s house,

“and behold, a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people and they died, and I alone have escaped to tell you.”

“It came so unexpectedly . . . the sound was deafening . . . there was no where to run or hide . . . it seemed as if the home of your oldest son where all your children had gathered was its target . . . the house exploded – and all of your children . . . were . . . killed.”^{vii}

It is as if all the forces of heaven and earth conspired against Job and his family. His life will never be the same. No voice speaks from heaven; no answers arrive from some heavenly angelic messenger, “Take heart Job, Satan is testing your faith in God. And by the way, God believes you will pass the test.”

No. The heavens are silent.

On the back cover of one of my books on Job, there is a classic painting of this scene. Four messengers are standing around the doorway of Job’s house. Three are standing there with the wind whipping about their robes and a fourth is pointing

into the distance where trees are bent by a fierce wind. Job has fallen to the ground; his sandals have fallen off; his arms and hands are covering his head in anguish.^{viii}

There is no such thing as a silver lining around *this* cloud.

Perhaps you have tasted this suffering.

This is like the situation of the woman I read about several weeks ago. Her pastor wrote that she had recently gone through an agonizing divorce – her husband having left her for a younger woman he met at work. They had two small children that she would now raise on her own. About the time the courts refused to give her adequate alimony, she was diagnosed with breast cancer. She was now moving in with her aged parents – into their small two-bedroom home – with limited income and failing health.

This woman was the faithful one. She was the one who walked with God.

There is no visible silver lining around this cloud.

Job’s Response

There is quite an invisible scene taking place, however.

We know what it looked like for Job – and more than likely for us as well.

Satan and his devil imps are watching – breathlessly craning their necks. They are hovering over this man of God to hear the first whisper of a curse toward God; to hear just one word of blasphemy from Job – just one. They are licking their lips in anticipation of the bitter blasphemies that would surely spew from Job’s mouth against his God; against his silent Lord; against his uncaring, failing, absent, unfaithful, unprotective, unrewarding, fickle Sovereign.

The devil and his demons cannot wait to race heavenward, following the sounds of Job’s curses, as they burst into the heavens. But then, in Job 1:20,

Then . . .

By the way, we are not told the amount of time that passed between verses 19 and 20. It could have been a matter of moments, but I doubt it. Perhaps it was more like a few hours – after the messengers had slipped away, or more than likely, when many were gathered around, weeping and wailing, and lamenting the incredible reversals of a godly man and his wife.

Five verbs appear in quick succession in the next verse, however, to indicate that the only cursing to be

heard would be the curses and shrieks of Lucifer and his demons who have failed.

- The text says, in Job 1:20a,

Then Job arose . . .

In other words, Job finally picked himself up off the ground.

- We read, in Job 1:20b,

. . . and tore his robe . . .

The word for “robe” indicates the outer garment that Job reached up and partially tore away from his neck.

This action was the custom of someone in grief. The torn garment was meant to portray their broken heart.

- Job also, we are told in the next phrase of Job 1:20,

. . . shaved his head, . . .

This was also a custom for expressing that someone had lost personal glory and dignity. They are utterly humbled by their circumstances; their grief; their sorrow that overwhelms them.

Now it is time to raise a fist toward the heavens and profane the name of God!

How Satan must have urged Job along; how the imps must have danced about him, aching to hear the name of God sullied and the character of God questioned. Perhaps they said, “There is no silver lining in this cloud, Job. Curse Him now . . . Now!”

- Job 1:20c,

. . . and he fell to the ground and worshiped.

Job prostrated himself, as the Hebrew language indicates, flat on his face, and began to worship God.

This is the amazing thing about this scene.

It is not so much that Job suffered – it is that Job did not do anything to deserve it.

Furthermore, Satan is behind it and God is allowing it – with no explanation to Job!

There is something that causes us to hang onto the grievances and hurts and pain that came to us unjustly. They were not fair. It was not right. We were mistreated.

We want a reason. We have rights and we deserve answers.

Job was given none.

Job’s response reveals deep lessons on what we should do when we suffer injustice, unexpected loss, heart wrenching sorrow.

Application – Lessons From a Suffering Worshiper

In Job 1:21 we are given several lessons from a suffering worshiper.

1. First, unexpected loss refocuses our attention on things that matter.

Notice the first phrase of Job 1:21.

He said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return there. . . .”

It does not get any clearer or more graphic than this! We were born without anything in our little clenched fists, and when we die, our hands will not be holding anything either.

The tragedies in life have a way of separating the insignificant from the significant – stuff that we tend to reverse in order of importance when things are going well.

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, author Max Lucado said, with a bit of sarcastic humor,

No one lamented a lost plasma television or a submerged SUV. No one ran through the streets yelling, “My cordless drill is missing.” If they mourned, it was for people lost. If they rejoiced, it was for people found. . . . Raging hurricanes have a way of prying our fingers off things that really don’t matter.^{ix}

If that is not convicting enough, listen to this article I came across some time ago.

According to the Self Storage Association, a trade group charged with monitoring such things, the country now possesses about 1.9 billion square feet of personal storage space outside of the home. All this space is contained in nearly 40,000 facilities owned and operated by more than 2,000 entrepreneurs, including a handful of publicly traded giants like Public Storage, Storage USA, and Shurgard.

According to a recent survey, the owners of 1 out of every 11 homes also own a self-storage space. This represents an increase of 75 percent since 1995.

Most operators of self-storage facilities report 90 percent occupancy. But, amazingly, as the amount of storage space required by homeowners has grown, so has the average size of the American house. In fact, the National Association of Homebuilders reports

that the average American house grew from 1,600 square feet in 1973 to 2,400 square feet by 2004 – and the number is growing.

So let us get this straight—houses got bigger, average family sizes got smaller, and yet we need two billion square feet of extra space to store our stuff!^x

That is too convicting! Let us move on.

The truth is that disaster strikes and we are reminded that we may be spending our lives collecting stuff we cannot take with us.

Naked we entered life – and naked we will exit.

The second lesson from a suffering saint is similar to the first.

2. Secondly, unanticipated suffering reminds us that everything about life is on loan.

In Job 1:21b, Job said,

. . . The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. . . .

With deep faith in the character of God, Job acknowledged the right of God over everything. And I mean everything:

- his possessions;
- his health;
- his kids;
- his businesses;
- his employees;
- his future.

Job says, as he lies there in the dust, “The Lord gave me all of that and the Lord has taken it away.”

After this phrase, we would expect Job to say, “And who does the Lord think He is?”

Instead, there is praise from Job and a third lesson.

3. Thirdly, unexplained sorrow purifies our trust in God who is beyond understanding.

In the last phrase of Job 1:21, Job says,

. . . Blessed be the name of the Lord.

It is interesting that three times in this speech of a lifetime, Job will use the name “Yahweh” – the personal name of God.^{xi}

What mattered to Job most, in his hour of greatest sorrow, was his relationship to his personal sovereign King.

God was under no obligation to tell Job all that He was up to. The clay, Paul wrote in Romans 9:21, has no right to judge the potter.

The greater lesson learned, as we watch Job on his face, is that it is not necessary for us to know God’s purposes before we bow to His authority.^{xii}

It is not necessary for us to know God’s plan before we bow in His presence!

It is, in fact, the sorrow that is unexplained that purifies our trust the most.

When there are no answers on earth; when it all seems so unfair; when life deals one cruel blow after another – one messenger after another; when there are clouds, but no silver lining is observable, that is when we worship God with childlike faith; that is when we worship Him on the basis of His promises, not His explanations.

It is no wonder that this chapter ends, in Job 1:22, with the words,

Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.

Why are we told this? Because “blame God” is what anyone would naturally do. Because most would say, “You could have stopped it. . . . Where were You?!”

There was no blame game with Job. He refused to plant seeds of bitterness that would grow deep roots that would cloud his perspective, stifle his worship, and shrivel his soul.

I was handed a poem several weeks ago that I read this past week at the funeral service of a little four-year-old girl. At a time when many would blame God or at least question Him, this family’s testimony was, like Job’s, without blame toward God.

I will close with the lyrics of this song, and let me suggest that lyrics like these are good to hang onto when there is no silver lining in sight.

My Father’s way may twist and turn,

My heart may throb and ache,

But in my soul I’m glad I know,

He maketh no mistake.

My cherished plans may go astray,

My hopes may fade away,

But still I’ll trust my Lord to lead

For He doth know the way.

Tho’ night be dark and it may seem

That day will never break;

*I'll pin my faith, my all in Him,
He maketh no mistake.
There's so much now I cannot see,
My eyesight's far too dim;
But come what may, I'll simply trust*

*And leave it all to Him.
For by and by the mist will lift,
And plain it all He'll make,
Through all the way, tho' dark to me,
He made not one mistake.*

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 1/21/2007 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Erwin Lutzer, Where Was God? (Tyndale House, 2006), p. 61.

ⁱⁱ Ibid., p. 1.

ⁱⁱⁱ Francis I. Andersen, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Job (Inter-Varsity Press), p. 89.

^{iv} Steve May, The Story File (Hendrickson, 2000), p. 236.

^v Andersen, p. 86.

^{vi} Charles Swindoll, Job: A Man of Heroic Endurance (W Publishing Group, 2004), p. 21.

^{vii} Ibid., p. 21.

^{viii} C. H. Spurgeon, The Suffering of Man & the Sovereignty of God (Fox River Press, 2001), back cover.

^{ix} Lutzer, p. 51.

^x Tom Vanderbilt, "Americans Are Storing More Stuff Than Ever," July 18, 2005, <http://www.slate.com>.

^{xi} John E. Hartley, New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Job (Eerdmans, 1988), p. 78.

^{xii} Lutzer, p. 39.