

Place: Lurgan Baptist: 28:8:2011

Reading: Job 1:1-22

GRAPPLING WITH THE GIANTS

6. THE GIANT OF SUFFERING

It was 15th February 1947. An Avianaca Airline flight bound for Quito, Ecuador crashed into the 14,000 foot-high towering peak of El Tablazo, and then dropped, a flaming mass of metal, into a ravine far below. None of the passengers in that DC-4 ever knew what happened. *They all died instantly.* One of the passengers, was Glenn Chambers, from New York. He was on his way to begin a ministry with the *Voice of the Andes*. Before leaving the Miami airport earlier that day, Chambers hurriedly wrote a note to his mom on a piece of paper he found on the floor of the terminal. That scrap piece of paper was once an advertisement with the single word **why** sprawled across the center. But between the mailing and the delivery of that note, Chambers was killed. When the letter did arrive, there staring up at his mom was that haunting question, **Why ?**

Mythere is no question so tormenting as the question “**Why ?**” Why does a good God allow tragedy to come to His children ? Why should that young beautiful girl be stricken with an incurable disease? Why should the innocent child of devoted parents be born mentally handicapped? Several ago I stood in a country cottage in Co. Antrim and gazed at the bullet holes that had shattered

that home. A Christian mother had been shot dead by terrorists through her bedroom window. As I gazed on the tear stained faces of her daughters I asked, “*why* “? On Tuesday the 28th June 1989, a friend of ours was travelling between Carryduff and Dundrum, when she had a serious accident. For six days I sat by her bedside in the Royal Victoria Hospital and watched her fighting for life helped by a life support machine. On Tuesday 4th July I was there with her husband and father when they told us she was clinically dead. They were shattered and so was I. A few days later I preached at her funeral service to a vast company of people. We wept as her children laid a flower on Mummy’s coffin. Why ? *Why do the righteous suffer ? Where is God when tragedy strikes ? If God is all loving, how can He allow human suffering ? Why do bad things happen to good people ? Does God not care ? Is the Lord worthy of worship in the tough times ? Or must the Lord buy worshippers with blessings ?* My these are difficult questions. In the words of this very book, “*man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward.*” “*Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble.*” (5:7 14:1) No-one is exempt from wrestling with the giant of suffering. Now suffering for the believer may come from at least 4 directions.

1. It may come to us through the Hands of the Lord:

The book of Hebrews reminds us, “*Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth and scoureth every son whom He receiveth.*” (Heb 12:6) This kind of suffering is not a denial of the Father’s love but an evidence of it.

2. It may come to us through the Hands of the World:

Peter speaks of suffering “*for righteousness sake,*” (1 Pet 3:14) and Christ says, “*In the world ye shall have tribulation.*” (Jn 16:33)

3. It may come to us through our Own Hands:

The Lord Jesus spoke of this in a symbolic way when He said “*And if thy hand offend thee cut it off,*” (Mk 9:43) He was talking of self imposed discipline.

4. It may come to us through the Hands of Satan:

Were Job’s trials not the direct result of the activities of the Devil ? (1:12 Lk 22:3) Job, who lived in the land of Uz, south of the Dead Sea, Old Testament Edom, today Saudi Arabia did not suffer because he had done something wrong. He suffered in spite of the fact that he was doing everything right. Here was a man that was marked by great faithfulness. (1:2) A man marked by a great family (1:2) A man marked by a great fortune (1:3) A man marked by a great fame (1:3) He was also a man marked by a great favour. (31:16) Then in one day he went from being a prince to being a pauper. He went from hero to zero. He lost everything. Job learned firsthand what it is like when life isn’t fair. My no man in the Bible, outside of the Lord Jesus Christ suffered more than Job. Outside of Jesus Christ no man suffered more unjustly and unfairly than Job.

But from Job we learn some lessons that will stand us in

good stead when we get that slip that sacks us, that bad doctors report, that tragic phone call, and we realise that life isn’t always fair. Now as we think of Job this think with me of three words. **Misery, Maturity, Mastery.**

(1) THE MISERY THAT JOB EXPERIENCED

What God did to Job. In (2:13) we read “*that his grief was very great,*” his grief was exceedingly great. During the Great depression, the stock market crashed, Black Monday. Well, Job, had the blackest of all Mondays. In one day he lost his fortune. (1:13-17) Then he lost his family (1:18-19) In one day Job lost those that he loved and he lost the things that he loved. Then he lost his fitness (2:7-8) and then to add insult to injury he even lost his friends for he says, “*My kinsfolk have failed and my familiar friends have forgotten me.*” (19:14) My in one day he went from sunshine to rain, from joy to pain. He went from blessedness to brokenness, from insulation to isolation, from happiness to heartache. But before we try to investigate the why of it, we need to understand the how of it. You see, Job’s troubles were,

(a) ACTIVATED BY A SATANIC FORCE:

Look at (1:8-11) We learn some interesting things about the Devil here. We learn that Satan does not have,

* The Presence of God:

He is not omni-present. He can only be in one place at a time.

* The Perception of God:

“ *And the Lord said unto Satan, have you considered my servant Job ?* ” (1:8) You see, God knew Job’s heart, but Satan didn’t. Satan cannot read your mind. He cannot know your thoughts for only God knows the heart.

* The Power of God:

Look at what he says in (1:9-10) How did he know that God had put a hedge about Job ? Well, he knew it because he had tried to get to Job, but he could not because Job was protected by the Lord. I want to tell you that the Devil and all of his demons in hell can attack you, but they cannot touch without the permission of the Lord. The Psalmist says, “ *the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him and delivereth them.* ” (34:7) Now in the midst of all this Satan asked a very good question, “ *Does Job fear God for nothing ?* ” (1:9) Satan’s accusation is that nobody is good without a cause. Nobody just loves God for the sake of loving God. Job served God only because God served Job.

The Devil said in effect, “ *Oh, I know why Job serves you. Job serves you because you’ve blessed him. Job serves you because you’ve been so good to him. But you take away his wealth, his health, and then you see whether or not Job serves you.* ” Perhaps the theme of the book of Job is not, “ ***Why do bad things happen to godly people ?*** ” but rather, “ ***Why are godly people godly ?*** ” Is the Lord to be worshipped because of who He is, or because of the things He gives ? Is God worthy to be loved and obeyed even if He does not bless us materially and protect us from suffering ? My if God never gave you one

blessing, would you still serve the Lord Jesus ? I have to ask myself if the Lord did not bless me spiritually, materially, domestically, would I still be as excited about worshipping the Lord, loving the Saviour, reaching the lost ? My here is a legitimate question. ***Do you serve the Lord because you expect Him to bless you ? Or do you serve Him because you want to bless Him ?*** I mean would you worship, love, serve the Lord, if there was nothing in it for you ? I heard about a mother who was exasperated with her little five old boy who had been giving her trouble all afternoon, and she said, “ *would you please straighten up and be good ?* ” He said, “ *I will if you will give me \$5.00* ” She looked at him and said, “ *Why can’t you be good for nothing like your Daddy ?* ” Well, the reason why Satan attacked Job was to prove that he wasn’t good for nothing. That he did not serve God because of what he could give to God, but because of what he was getting from God. In effect, what he was saying to God was, you’ve bought Job off, you’ve paid him off, he has to worship you, and he owes it to you. Job worships you because of what you’ve done for him. (a)

(b) ALLOWED BY A SOVEREIGN FATHER:

For even though Satan was behind all of this, behind Satan was God. You see, God allowed Satan to attack ***Job’s possessions.*** “ *And the Lord said unto Satan, behold all that he hath is in thy power.* ” (1:12) Then He allowed Satan to attack ***Job’s person.*** “ *And the Lord said unto Satan behold he is in thy hand, but save his life.* ” (2:6) You see, while Satan was the immediate cause of Job’s troubles, God was the ultimate cause, for these troubles

were allowed by a Sovereign God. Indeed, is the sovereignty of God, not the prominent theme in this difficult book. This is more than being about a book about Job, this is actually a book about God. God controls Satan's power and man's circumstances. *God is God. He will do as He pleases, when He pleases, with whom He pleases, without consulting his creatures and He will do so for His own glory and the ultimate good of His people. So where is God when tragedy strikes ?* He is on throne working out his purposes for His glory and our good. So why do the righteous suffer ?

Stephen Lawson says, “ *the righteous suffer because God, according to His infinite wisdom chooses for them to suffer.*” Sidlow Baxter says, “ ***Behind all the suffering of the godly is a high purpose of God, and beyond it all, is an afterwards of glorious achievement.***” Do you see what Job says in (2:10) “ *Or shall we not receive adversity ?*” You see, Job's God was not some heavenly Santa Claus who sits on the edge of heaven, dropping good little gifts, wrapped in silver, out of the sky saying, “ *I hope this will make you happy. I hope this will please you.*” My that is not the God of heaven. The Sovereign God of heaven disposes and dispenses what brings glory to Himself.

You see, whether we like it or not, God not only comforts the afflicted, He afflicts the comfortable. He not only brings us good, but He brings us adversity. Do you want to know why ? Because God is not so much interested in your happiness as He is in your holiness. Was Job not a better man for going through what God allowed ? Indeed

though he lost a great deal through this soul crushing experience, he gained far more than he lost. (42:12-16) Through this furnace of affliction he perseveres and becomes an even stronger, more mature believer. (42:5) ***My are there not times when we just have to rest in the faithfulness of God ?*** Knowing that God is too wise to make mistakes, too loving to be unkind, too powerful to be denied in His purpose. One of the greatest hymn writers the church has ever known William Cowper was a man who suffered greatly. The last hymn he wrote, composed in 1774, speaks of the mystery of God's design behind our adversity. Cowper wrote,

***God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm
Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain
God is His own interpreter
And He will make it plain***

(2) THE MATURITY THAT JOB EXPRESSED

What God did in Job. You see, every trial and trouble is a test. Job knew that. He said, “ *But He knoweth the way that I take, when He hath tried me I shall come forth as gold.*” (23:10) Every time a trial, a trouble, a tribulation comes into your life, the Lord is saying to you, “ *will you continue to trust Me, and love Me, and serve Me or not ?*” Do you recall what Peter says ? “ *In this ye greatly rejoice though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness,*

through manifold temptations. That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” (1 Pet 1:6-7) You see, the faith that cannot be tested cannot be trusted. Until faith is put to the test you can never be sure of what you are calling faith is really faith. All that glitters is not gold and all that believes is not faith. It is only by testing that we can determine the real character of our faith. Now Job’s faith was tested. And through this test his maturity was revealed. His faith was tested,

(a) BY HIS FRIENDS:

“ Now when Job’s three friends heard of all this evil that was come upon him, they came every one from his own place.” (2:11) Times of prosperity bring out people who want to be your friend. Times of adversity show the true colour of those you thought were your friends. Now these friends apparently came to sympathise, but they really came to scrutinise and them to sermonise. They took one look at Job and they said, *“ Job, we know what your problem is. There is sin in your life.”* (4:8) You see, they believed in a **“health and wealth gospel.”** They believed that if a man loved the Lord enough and trusted the Lord enough, he would be healthy, wealthy, and wise. Their theology taught that suffering is always a result of sin. *In effect, they believed that if you’re not rich, then you are not right, if you are not healthy, then you are not holy.* Now I want to stress that I believe if you are a child of God you are going to suffer if you sin. David suffered. For

twelve months he carried around in his heart, unconfessed sin, Then in (Psalm 51) he beats out his confession and he says, *“ Make me to hear joy and gladness that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice.”* (Ps 51:8) You see, if you are bound to sin, you are bound to suffer. Suffering follows sin, just as night follows day. But listen carefully. *Even though sin always causes suffering, suffering is not always caused by sin.* (Jn 9:3) The Lord Jesus never sinned, but He suffered more than other man in history. You see, suffering is not always a sign that you are not right with God. In Job’s case it was a sign that he was right with God. *God did not pick on a sinning man. God picked on a sanctified man.* Now what Job’s so called **“friends,”** were really saying was this, *“ If you would be like us, and be as good as we are you wouldn’t be suffering. Because you are suffering there must be some real sin in your life.”* Now even though the Lord does sometimes discipline His children by affliction and suffering, it is never your business to tell the person that. That is God’s business.

I heard about a preacher who lived out West in the United States and he came home from holiday. One of his members met him at the train station. The preacher said, *“ Well, how are things at home ?”* The man said *“ Real bad, Pastor. A tornado came through here and wiped out my house.”* *“ Well,”* the preacher said, *“ I’m not surprised. I’ve been warning you about the way you’ve been living. I told you that God would punish you for your sin.”* He said, *“ Well, preacher it also destroyed your house.”* *“ It did,”* the preacher said, *“ Well, sometimes the ways of the Lord are just past human understanding.”*

Job's faith was tested (a)

(b) BY HIS FRUSTRATIONS:

Job asked a very familiar question that you have asked God, or one day you will ask the Lord. *"Have I sinned? What have I done to you O watcher of men? Why have you set me as your target, so that I am a burden to myself?"* (7:20) Many times Job asked *"why?"* Do you know what? God never answered his question and Job was frustrated not only by his suffering but by God's silence. At one point Job said, *"But I would speak to the Almighty and I desire to reason with God."* (13:3) My Job wanted to talk to the Lord but God was not talking. You see, God does not owe anyone an explanation for what He does. As a matter of fact when you and I hurt deeply what really need is not an explanation from God but a revelation of God. Now suppose God had told Job was going on.

Suppose the Lord came to Job and said, *"Listen the Devil is going to be attacking you and going to be doing some terrible things to you, but I want you to know that I am going to take care of you, and you'll get double of everything that you have lost."* Tell me, would that have been a test of Job's faith? You see, Job was written to help us understand that we don't always have to understand. My there are things that are going to happen in your life that you will not understand this side of glory. But you don't have to understand what God is doing if you can trust God to always do what is right. You see, to God the most important thing about Job was his

faith. God did not need his family, his fortune, his flocks, his fame. He already had those. He tells Job in (41:11) *"whatsoever is under the whole heaven is mine."* What God wanted was his faith, because *"without faith it is impossible to please God."* (Heb 11:6) You will never know what kind of faith you really have, until you don't have anything but God. You see, real faith is believing and praising the Lord no matter what. We've got these healing evangelists who say to sick people, *"If you just had enough faith you will be healed."* My real faith is not believing God will heal you. Real faith is believing God may heal you, but praising Him anyway. You see, if you only praise, worship, and serve the Lord when things are good, your praise is not worth a half a hallelujah to Him. I love the way the three Hebrew children responded to the King when faced with a burning fiery furnace. They said, *"Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us but if not, be it known unto thee O king that we not serve thy gods."* (Dan 3:17) Have you a faith that's prepared to worship and serve God even when things don't turn out the way you think they should? Job had for he got to the place where he said, *"Though He slay me yet will trust in Him."* (13:14) (1) (2)

(3) THE MASTERY THAT JOB ENJOYED

What God did for Job. You see, through this trouble God did some things for Job that otherwise He would not have done, and Job learned some lessons that otherwise he would not have learned. For one thing,

(a) GOD REVEALED HIS FAULT:

For 37 chapters God is silent. Throughout all of Job's questions the Lord has remained silent. He just watches and listens. But then beginning in (Ch 38) God gives Job a test and he missed every question. First of all God reminds Job of,

1. His Pre-eminence:

God says, “ *Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth ? declare if thou hast understanding ?* ” (38:4) He said, “ *Job I created this world, I can do anything in it and through it that I choose to do.* ”

2. His Power:

“ *I know that Thou canst do everything.* ” (42:2) Job now understands that God not only has the right to do everything but He has the resource to do everything.

3. His Purpose:

For Job says, “ *I know that no purpose of yours can be withheld from you.* ” (42:2) Now Job understands that not only God has a right to do anything, and the resource to do anything, but He has a reason for what He does. My God has a purpose and a plan for your life, and for this universe. Do you know something ? When God finishes talking with him, Job says, “ *I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.* ” (42:5-6) You see the bottom line is, that imperfect man has no right to question the motives and methods of a perfect God. “ *Job just because you don't see Me, you can't hear Me, or you're not able to understand Me, doesn't mean that I am any less God. I am the One who created it all, controls*

it all, conducts it all and completes it all. ” (a)

(b) GOD RENEWED HIS FELLOWSHIP:

For God accepts Job. (42:8) In other words, the Lord restores to Job the joy of His salvation. (a) (b)

(c) GOD REBUKED HIS FRIENDS:

(42:7-8) This just goes to show that Job should have let God handle his friends to begin with. Charles Stanley outstanding Bible teacher in the U.S.A, said that when he was being unfairly criticised at a point in his ministry, *he learned that people cannot fight three things, they cannot fight silence, they cannot fight prayer, and they cannot fight love.* Did you know that the greatest way to handle criticism is not to handle it all, but to let God handle it.

(d) GOD RESTORED HIS FORTUNE:

“ *And the Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends, also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.* ” (42:10) Someone has well said, that “ ***God often digs the wells of joy with the spades of sorrow.*** ” That is true. All's well that ends well, and the book of Job tells us that eventually, whether here on earth or up in heaven, all will end well for the child of God. Do you remember I told about Glenn Chambers who scribbled that note to his mother before his plane crashed ? Do you know what he had written on that note ? “ ***God is too kind to do anything cruel, too wise to make a mistake and too deep to explain Himself.*** ”

My you may never know the reason but when you cannot trace God's hand you can trust God's heart. Years later I can just imagine Job sitting on the front porch of his house, talking to his grandchildren, and he recounts to them all the things that the Lord had taught him in that time in his life. All of a sudden he bursts out into a song.

I've had many tears and sorrows

I've had questions for tomorrow

There've been times I didn't know right from wrong

But in every situation God gave blessed consolation

That my trials came to only make me strong

Through it all, through it all

I've learned to trust in Jesus

I've learned to trust in God

Through it all, through it all

I've learned to depend upon His Word."

Will you do that ?