

## Why do bad things happen to good people?

### Introduction

Some days are just bad days. Some months are just bad months. Some years are just bad years. At times it feels like tragedy just falls on top of tragedy. 1993 Was my worst year. Kelle and I were in our third year of marriage and the year began with a surprise pregnancy. Kelle and I planned to have no kids... but once that little guy was in there, we fell in love. But before long, the baby died and Kelle miscarried. In April, my friend Pete – a student I disciplined - fell over in the bathroom and hit his head going into a coma. His parents stayed with us and we had many hours in the hospital. Then in July, my parents had their divorce finalized. I sat in the courtroom and watched as my childhood world split in two. In August, we were babysitting a 16 year old when she was run over by a car lacerating her liver. Her dad was in Ukraine and mom was mentally unstable so we – at age 25 – were making all the medical decisions. We found ourselves pregnant again and in October, our second baby died in the womb.

Tragedy is a part of the human condition. Accidents happen. Disease strikes. Divorce hits. People die. Jobs are lost. And it makes us stop and ask questions. Important questions. Questions for God. Questions like:

### Why DO bad things happen to good people?

It is perhaps the most ancient of all theological, pragmatic, life questions. And it drives deeper questions. Is there a God? Does he control the universe? Does he care about me? Is he taking revenge for something bad I did? Why do evil people seem to prosper while I am getting the shaft?

It is no wonder that our most ancient book of the Bible, the book of Job, starts with this question. But it does not stop there! It talks about forces of evil, how stuff works in heaven, and science – tons of science. So this summer, we are going to spend 8 weeks learning from the genius of Job. We will tackle suffering – which is good news for those who are suffering. But so much more. So let's start by looking at Job 1 and today. Job is about 40% of the way through your Bible. Before the psalms, so turn to Job 1:1.

**1 In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job.**

Let's pause right here for a minute. I had to cut a full section on the history of Job – dating and the place – Uz because of time for this message. However, I did make a youtube video on ccomaha to make up for it, so if you want the details, check them out on our channel. It is fascinating. Truth of the matter is that Nobody knows where Uz... WUZ. And scholars disagree on the timing of it's writing.

Note this, though. Job is likely the first book of the Bible to have been written. Scholars disagree because the evidence is so scarce, but my best guess is that the writing of Job is 600 or more years before Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible – around 1800-2000 BC... or 4000 years ago!

This is important because Job was not building on Moses' experience with God. He did not know the law, the prophets, the exodus, the ten commandments. He did not know stories of God's character. He was asking questions based on logic, experience and creation. He didn't know "Is God good?" "Is God in control?" "Does God see me?" So his debates with his friends are really raw and fresh. It totally changes the way that you read Job. As I know many of you will start this week!

And here is a little bit on the structure of JOB

**Structure and writing –** (Three clicks – Middle column, then left, then right)

Theory 1	Structure	Theory 2
Author – Elihu the scribe	1-2 Story	Author - Community
Job, B, Z, E are historical people	3 – Job's Lament	Job, B, Z, E are Philosophies
Written all at once	2-30 – 3 Debates	Written over time
Historical	31-37 – Elihu's spin	Dramatic/Poetic
	38-41 God Speaks	
	42 Story	

I will treat Job as if 1 is true, but to be quite honest, I don't think it matters much. Here is why: Jesus affirmed the whole Old Testament as true, so whether there is a single author or community, written all at once or over hundreds of years, single people speaking or philosophies, the truth still hangs strong as God's truth. You know, God can choose to write his book in a moment or over time. Using one person or many... it is his book!

In fact, even those who take a strict historical approach don't land at the conclusion that these poetic dialogues happened 'on the spot'. Why? Because the poetry is so good, so symmetrical, so linguistically excellent, that it had to have been carefully written, not just spoken spontaneously. That kind of quality takes thoughtful consideration.

**So, back to our question.** Why DO bad things happen to good people? Was Job even 'good'?

This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. <sup>2</sup> He had seven sons and three daughters, <sup>3</sup> and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East.

<sup>4</sup> His sons used to hold feasts in their homes on their birthdays, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. <sup>5</sup> When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would make arrangements for them to be purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom.

So, the survey says: Blameless, upright, feared God and shunned evil. Ya know, that is just about perfect. Not actually perfect – even Job admits to sin later on in the book. But that is true of righteous people – they tend to be very aware of their shortcomings and lean into God in order to work on them. Not only that, but he made sacrifices ‘just in case’. Not only just in case he sinned, but for his kids too! And his biggest fear: that they would curse God in their hearts. Wow. Job was really something!

Now, if that was not enough, Job is a wealthy business man. The Elon Musk of Uz. I did a quick internet calculation of the value of his sheep, oxen, camels and donkeys and came up with about 8 Million. Plus wages for servants, plus land... the dude was rich. Summarized by this “He was the greatest man among all the people of the East.” There was nobody like him in terms of both righteousness and success!

To make matters better, their kids liked each other! They did birthday parties and feasts together, with parties in their homes – 10 a year. One sign of good parenting is that the adult kids like to hang out together. Really, if there is a definition of a “Good Man”, Job is it!

<sup>6</sup> One day the angels<sup>[a]</sup> came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan<sup>[b]</sup> also came with them. <sup>7</sup> 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.”

<sup>8</sup> 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.”

<sup>9</sup> “Does Job fear God for nothing?” Satan replied. <sup>10</sup> “Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. <sup>11</sup> But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.”

<sup>12</sup> The Lord said to Satan, “Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.”

Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.

I wanted to read this because it is critical to the story. But we are actually going to preach about it next week. So hang tight to all of your questions about Satan in heaven and so forth and don’t miss next week’s message! But Satan sets out to destroy Job.

<sup>13</sup> One day when Job’s sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother’s house, <sup>14</sup> a messenger came to Job and said, “The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, <sup>15</sup> and the Sabeans attacked and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”

<sup>16</sup> While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, “The fire of God fell from the heavens and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”

<sup>17</sup> While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, “The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”

<sup>18</sup> While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, “Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother’s house, <sup>19</sup> when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”

Wow. That is a bad day. A bad month and a bad year all rolled into one. Imagine in one day, the you lose oxen, donkeys, sheep, servants, camels. Your \$8M fortune gone in an instant. Kinda feels like investing with FTX and Sam Bankman Fried....

But it gets worse. Because at one of those kid parties, a wind came and all ten of his kids were killed in a moment. Imagine the heartache. He went from the most blessed man of his day to wallowing in tragedy. So painful. And represented here are all kinds of tragedy. Did you notice?

- Tragedy from moral evil – Sabean and Chaldean attacks
- Tragedy from natural evil – East wind
- Tragedy from supernatural power – Fire of God

You could not write off these problems to just “well, there are bad people out there. Don’t blame God... blame people.” Sometimes, that is the case. But this time, there is more. Everything is working against him. There were moral forces against him, natural forces against him and supernatural forces against him. It was bad.

(Now one more thing I had to cut was an excursus on the idea of natural evil. Why are their hurricanes, lightning and earthquakes? That is one more video, but it won’t come out until Wednesday – once again on our youtube channel – CCCOMAHA.)

Now, some of you may be able to relate to Job. Not on that level. He is an extreme case. And in chapter 2 it gets worse because Job also gets diseases and sores all over his body. It is really gross.

But maybe you are in the middle of something horrible. Maybe you have had a financial collapse in your life. The bills are higher than you can pay and you have no idea how to dig out. Maybe someone close to you has died and your heart is filled with grief. The loneliness is like darkness wrapped around you. It is hard to get up in the morning. Maybe, you have lost something so extreme that you are experiencing anxiety – panic attacks – fear of the next loss – and it has been debilitating. And you ask “God, why?”

And your questions get even bigger. Maybe God doesn’t really love me. Maybe he isn’t even love at all. Or maybe God is not there for me. Or maybe he’d like to do something, but he is just not powerful enough.

This is actually NOT unique to you. Classic philosophers – Most famously the Scottish philosopher David Hume - have argued for many years that God cannot be perfectly loving and all powerful and still have evil exist in this world. If he was good he WOULD eliminate evil and if he was powerful he COULD eliminate evil.

But that eliminates the possibility that God may have a higher value than our comfort. And that is love. God values love over comfort and love requires a choice. If there is no choice, there is no love. If God forced us to love him then we wouldn’t be his kids, we would be his robots. The thing that makes kelle’s love valuable to me is that she wakes up every morning and makes a choice to say “Oh, I love you... you are looking very fine today.” Ok, maybe some days she says that. But it is freely given so it is truly love.

But the downside of free choice is that she could choose to hate. She could walk away. She could throw some arsenic in my iced coffee and it would all be over. This is the risk God took on humanity. And so evil was introduced into the world and poisoned our existence. But God values LOVE so much – that our love for him and each other be genuine, that he allows pain to exist. He wants us to become like him – perfectly loving... but it is only possible with choice.

Now, that does not get at the question of natural evil. Lightning, Hurricanes, straight winds... and I don't have time for that this morning so I have made a video for our youtube channel that addresses these issues. And you can check it out on cccomaha channel of youtube.

But it leaves us with the super important question: how do we respond when tragedy strikes? When we have been abused or lost someone or been victimized? Lets's look at Job.

**<sup>20</sup> At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship <sup>21</sup> and said:**

Hold on there. Greif and Worship in tension. Do you see it? Greif is symbolized by the tearing of a robe and shaving a head. This was the ancient sign for "all is not well!" "I am in serious pain!"

At the same time, he worships God. Whoa. I don't know if I could do that. But Job does. You know, there is this subplot in the book of Job about cursing God. Satan says if he can strike Job, that Job will curse God. Job is afraid that his kids will curse God. Job's wife tells Job to curse God. And Job wrestles with it. He curses the day he was born, but he never curses God. He worships God. He maintains two things throughout the book:

- 1) That he never did anything to deserve this set of difficulties
- 2) That God's character is unimpeachable

He worships... bows to his knees and worships. Because God is still good. Even when life is bad. And when you are grieving... that is when you need God the most. Guys, lets get this worship idea right. God did not give us worship as a gift because he has need of it. He has no needs that can be fulfilled by humans. He gives us worship because WE NEED IT. It aligns us with God's heart. It spurs on gratitude. It offers hope in the midst of depression and peace in the midst of anxiety. It gives an eternal perspective and breathes relief into the soul. Job continues to worship while he greives because it is just unwise to cut yourself off from this resource when you need it!

**Why doesn't God remove suffering and evil? At least the worst of it?**

**Chart –**

Imagine that this chart represents all evil in the world and all suffering. It is Typhoid and Murder and hurricanes and betrayal and Divorce... the whole deal. We know that God allows this much evil. We also know that he suppresses a ton of evil as well. He holds it back. So we ask the question – Why doesn't God eliminate some of the worst of the evil? (Note, we never ask why doesn't God allow more evil pain and suffering... but that's for another day.) So, let's say he got rid of the worst stuff – lets say war and cancer and child abuse. Boom. Gone. Then we have a **graph that looks like this:** And what question might we ask? Not... why isn't it higher, but why don't you get rid of the next 10%? Racism and Lies and Heart Disease.... And then this **graph**. And this goes on and on until you get to: Dental pain, telemarketers and the World Wrestling Federation... **We will always ask the same thing... why not less?**

### **Until you get to zero. Why doesn't God just get rid of it all?**

Well, if God eliminated all evil at midnight tonight, which of us would be here to enjoy that world in the morning? Truth is, I don't know why God doesn't make suffering less prevalent. And I don't know why he doesn't make it more prevalent.

**What I do know is that suffering strikes everyone.** It hits good people and bad people. If it is not in your world today, it will be tomorrow.

Friends, I don't know what your tragedies are. You may have never had a Job like experience or a 1993 year like mine. But maybe you were brutally abused by someone who should have loved you. Maybe your Dad died when you were three and it has had profound impact on your life ever since. Maybe you are in the middle of divorce and can't see a great way toward reconciliation or hope or freedom. How do you respond to God? What do you think of you?

Job is innocent and God is innocent, yet Job has had tragedy after tragedy strike. When he worships God, this is what he says.

"Naked I came from my mother's womb,  
and naked I will depart."<sup>[4]</sup>

The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away;  
may the name of the Lord be praised."

<sup>22</sup> In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing

Right in chapter 1 he stays true to God. And he frames it with an interesting quote "Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I will depart." In other words, I came into this world with nothing and I will leave with nothing. Everything we have here is just luxury. It comes and it goes. Job is SOOO in the bullseye with this one. There are treasures in heaven you can take, but most of life is just window dressing that you leave behind.

But sometimes, I go... oh, but the kids... how do you say "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away when it comes to the kids?

How do you say may the name of the Lord be praised (some translations: Blessed be the name of the Lord?)

### **Cedar Story**

17 years ago, Kelle and I were at our Michigan campground – Cedar Bay. During the days, kids are taken care of by crew – who were college students. Haiven was one. She and 1 year old Colter had Caleb as their leader. Caleb was over 6 feet tall, handsome and went to Northwestern University – so you know he was smart. He was a missionary kid and chose to serve in the summer watching 1 year olds for pastors at a camp for little money. You know he had great character and deep love. He was likeable and funny.

When we got back in the fall, we were surprised to learn that Caleb had battled depression for years. And that fall, at Northwestern, he ended his own life. We were shocked and grieved.

We were even more shocked the next summer when his parents came to our week at camp. They flew in from the Philippines to be with us. They said it made them feel close to Caleb – because all summer

he talked about how much he loved Cedar Bay, how close he felt to God, and how his favorite week was Pastor's week – where he got to spend long hours with one year old Haiven and one year old Colter.

### **Music Begins**

In one of our services, they pulled out the song straight from Job 1 – blessed be the name of the Lord. And Kelle and I watched this missionary couple in the front row with their hands lifted high singing at full voice “He gives and takes away... he gives and takes away... my heart will choose to say “Lord, blessed be your name.” They were worshipping, but I was a mess. I had an 11 year old at the time... also named Caleb and I just couldn't imagine. But they...Their hope was in God, in eternity, in his goodness.

Instead of running from God, they ran TO God. They took their pain and tragedy to him, trusting that his eternal plans are better than ours.

I want to ask everyone to stand and ask Yostie to lead us in that song out of this passage. And I want to invite you to take a step of faith as we sing. Think about something you have lost. Maybe it is a job. Maybe someone you love. Maybe it was your innocence. Maybe your self respect. And remember the bigness of God – and his goodness. He gives and takes away, my heart will choose to say lord blessed be your name. Run TO God. Let him heal your wounds. Give him praise even in the midst of the storm...

### **Blessed be the Name**