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Message: Trusting God When Life Doesn't Make Sense

Transcribed Message
September 15, 2019

This is obviously a different morning for us than most Sunday mornings. One of the great benefits of being the people of God is doing what we just did -- singing and lifting our voices in praise to God, focusing on Him and His character, His goodness, His grace, His mercy. We come together because God has told us to. We come together because it gives us an opportunity to encourage each other, to lift each other up, to bear each other's burdens, to comfort each other. So we are glad that we can be together even on this morning that is so difficult for us as a church family. If you're a guest this morning, we'll be talking a lot more in just a little bit about the events of this past week and its impact obviously on the life of our church and in the school as well.

Those of you that are on the church email list or the school email list or part of the Covenant family or the Southwest Covenant Schools family know that on Friday night at the Friday night football game, Peter Webb, who is Jim and Stacy's son, sustained a very serious head injury. At first, I think people were maybe encouraged by the fact that he pulled his helmet off and said something to his brother Ben. But then he collapsed, never regained consciousness and from the moment that he arrived at Children's Hospital ICU till this morning there has been absolutely no brain activity. So the decision has been made given the medical circumstances that we believe Peter is with Jesus and they are moving forward with organ donation.

I've told a number of people there's probably been a million tackles this last week on all the various levels of football that has been played across this country. You just don't ever think that something like this would happen. It wasn't, I've been told, a particularly violent looking collision as sometimes we see and we gasp when we see those. But this was just one of those very unusual circumstances. Jim and Stacy are so appreciative of the love and the support. That's the update from the Webb family. They are, if you know them, a remarkable family. Their faith is strong. They are walking an incredibly difficult path as you can imagine.

We are going to take a different turn this morning than we would have normally otherwise. Instead of teaching from Proverbs, which just wasn't going to work, I'm going to bring a word of encouragement from God's Word to us as the people of God. Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we collectively come to you with heavy hearts. Lord, we are so thankful for the body of Christ. We're thankful for this body. We're thankful for the ministry that we share with each other. Lord, we know that when the storms of life come, and they do come, that we always have You. We have Your truth. We have Your Word. We have each other. We are so very grateful. Father, we thank You that we can cast our cares upon You and know that You care for us. We pray for Jim and Stacy, for their boys, for their extended families. We pray that Your mercy will flood into their lives, that Your presence will be more real than they have ever experienced, that Your grace will sustain and carry them in these coming days. Lord, thank You for the hope that we have in Christ. Thank You for the gift that is eternal life. Thank You that Peter is forever in Your presence. Thank You for the testimony of the gospel which is the power of God unto salvation. Lord, we are as Your people wanting to trust in You with all of our heart, to not lean on our own understanding, in all of our ways acknowledge You and know that You will direct our paths. We thank You. We love You. We pray that Your mercies will flow into each of our lives in full measure. In Jesus's name, amen.

Martyn Lloyd Jones was a pastor and writer and I suppose even a theologian in England in the 20th century. He made this statement: "The child of the light sometimes is found walking in darkness, but he goes on walking." He goes on walking. The darkness of course is the darkness of suffering, the darkness of pain, the darkness of death, the uncertainty of tragedy. Every time we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, especially in circumstances such as this, all kinds of questions flood into our mind and our hearts. Probably at the very center of all of those questions is the one that shouts why. Why would something like this happen? Why would we see this precious family going through this terrible tragedy? If you believe in chance or fate or luck, then ultimately it doesn't really matter. It's just bad luck. It's just the way things go. It just happened. But if you believe in a loving God, if you believe in a God who is sovereign over all the details of life, who rules our world, then it makes a lot of difference. It makes those questions in many ways even harder. Is God loving or isn't He? Is God loving or is

He powerless? Is He powerful but uncaring? Either way, the choices don't look very good if we believe in a personal God who is sovereign over the details of life.

You remember back in the 80s when Harold Kushner wrote that book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. Millions of people bought the book. Millions more espoused its philosophy and explanation which is accepted by millions of people. God is loving but He simply is not all-powerful. Bad things are simply out of His control. If He could do something about them, He would but He can't do anything about them because He's not all-powerful. He actually says in the book, "I can worship a God who hates suffering but can't eliminate it more than I can worship a God who chooses to allow His children to suffer and die." Before we buy into that man-made view of God, maybe we need to stop and suggest that there is another possibility, that the God who is described in the Bible is in fact a loving God. He is a sovereign God and He is all-powerful. He works in ways that are beyond our understanding. He does things for our good even when we don't know how they can be for our good. He does things always for His glory. Even if He tried to explain them to us, I'm pretty sure we wouldn't be able to understand them.

Let me just take a few minutes this morning and show you what that actually looks like in the life of a man in the Bible. You know him. You know him well. He has a book named after him. His name is Job. Job was a man who knew God. He lived probably 4500 years ago. He lived in a real place. He was a real man. He isn't just a story. He's not just a myth. He is not just a legend. Job physically lived on planet Earth. He lived in the Middle East. He lived very near to what is modern day Jordan. He predated even Moses. Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. Job lived before him. The point of that is the very first book chronologically that was written in our Scriptures is about this man Job. It has to do with this incredibly challenging subject that we are dealing with as the people of God even today. Why is it that good people suffer? Why do bad things happen?

In Job 1, it reads this way: "There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. He possessed 7000 sheep, 3000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys, and very many servants,

so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the East. His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, 'It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.' Thus Job did continually." There are a number of things in those verses that we learn about this man Job. He was strong in his faith. He was described as a righteous man. He was a man who pursued God, feared God, turned from evil. He was a man who knew the blessings of God. He not only knew the blessings of God in terms of his family, but as those verses describe he knew the blessings of God in terms of just material possessions. He was a man of great influence according to verse three. He was respected. He was a man with a good reputation, a man of integrity. If anyone didn't deserve to have bad things happen to him, we would've picked Job and we would've said this is a good man. He didn't deserve any of this. But Job was not only a man who knew God, he was a man who knew suffering and he knew suffering in a way that perhaps no one else has ever known since.

As you read through his story, it begins with one disaster after another unfolding in his life to the point that all of his children are gone, all of his possessions are gone, and in a second attack that comes against them, even his own health is gone. All of this befalls him. In this short amount of time, Job's life is totally and completely turned upside down. Into that setting come those three friends who are really nothing more than three detractors. Those three friends suggest to him that they know the answer to why it is that these bad things are happening to Job. Their answer is: "These bad things are happening, Job, because you sinned and somehow your heart is not where it needs to be before God. If you'll just repent and turn away from those things, God will once again restore and He will bless you. You just simply need to get right with God." Job dialogues as the story unfolds with these three friends, but he also wants to enter into a dialogue with God. As Job enters into this desire to dialogue with God about what's happening in his life, Job has a lot of questions for God.

As you know the story, it didn't quite go the way Job expected. God was willing to have a dialogue with him, but it wasn't Job who was going to be asking the questions. It would be God who is asking the questions. As God does that in verse 38 in the 38th chapter, as He responds to Job and Job's inquiry as to why it is that these things have befallen him, God comes back with countless observations and questions for Job with regard to where he was when God created and did all the things that God has done. And you remember that as Job is processing all of this, there's not one time in that series of responses and questions that God says to Job: "Job, I'm sorry. I'm sorry that all of this has happened to you. I didn't have anything to do with it. I wish it hadn't happened to you too, but because I'm not powerful enough to prevent these things from happening, I feel just as bad as you." I mean, it would've been a perfect place for God to do that as Job pressed Him for an answer. It would have been the perfect place for God to declare that He's not omnipotent. He's not omnipresent. He doesn't control all of the details of life, but God does not do that.

Instead, the answer that Job got is one of the most extraordinary passages in all of the Bible. As God responds to Job by really subpoenaing Job and bringing him before the court and asking him some 70 questions having to do with the power of God, the wisdom of God, and the greatness of God, in all of that interchange God does not see fit to reveal His grand design to Job. But what He in fact does is He reveals Himself to Job. He reveals not the answers that Job thought he wanted or needed, but rather God revealed Himself. And I would say to you, my friends, it is only God's revelation of Himself that is strong enough to step into the lives of the Webb family, into the Covenant Community Church family, into the Southwest Covenant Schools family and bring hope and healing in the midst of such intense pain. It is God's revelation of Himself that sustain us.

Suffering plays a very unique role in the life of the child of God. Job is the classic illustration of that. It reminds us of our absolute and total dependency on God. It is so easy as we go along in life to just become somewhat independent, to begin to think we can handle it. It is especially true when things are going well. Suffering has a way of bringing us back and driving us back to God. It is CS Lewis's comment: God uses pain to shout to an inattentive world.

Suffering also serves as a reminder that we live in a fallen, broken, and abnormal world. We live in a world where things are not as they should be. Years ago, Thomas Harris wrote a book *I'm Okay, You're Okay*. The truth is we all know that's not the case. We all know that there is a problem in our world and the problem is us. I'm not okay. You're not okay. Something is wrong. Suffering also causes us to turn our thoughts to what is certain and what is clear about God rather than about what He has chosen to not reveal to us. It's futile and it is foolish to pursue all of the questions that we can think of in this circumstance. The why's of suffering. The why's of this happening. If my thoughts are focused on what is uncertain and what is unknown, I move towards despair and hopelessness. But if I consciously turn to know more about God, His plan, His love, His grace, His mercy, His power, His goodness, His compassion, and His promises. It is what Isaiah said in the 50th chapter and 10th verse: "Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of his servant? Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God."

My friends, at the end of the day, as much as Job suffered, as much heartache and pain as he went through, God did something far more incredible in the sending of His Son. His Son became the sin bearer of the world. He subjected himself to the greatest pain that anyone could ever experience. Jesus came to fix a broken world. That's where we want to put our focus. That is where we want to put our hope. God doesn't explain all the things that He does in this life, but He has given us the greatest example of His love, grace, and mercy in the sending of His Son. It is in that gospel that we rest. It is in that gospel that we hope. It is in that gospel that gives us the assurance that we have life that is eternal. That is where we will find all that we need and only in that.

Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we're so very thankful for Your mercies that are new every morning. Great is Your faithfulness to us, O God. Lord, we continue to lift up Jim and Stacy and their family. We continue to lift each other up. We continue to pray for Your mercies to flow into our life, Father. We pray that in the midst of this tragedy that there will be great glory that comes to You. We are asking, Father, that Your gospel will be heard, declared, embraced, believed. We ask that Peter's life, as young as it was, will have an impact even in this tragic circumstance. Father, we love You. Lord

Jesus, we thank You for the indescribable gift that You are to us. Holy Spirit of God, we thank You that You take the deep things of God, the truths of God, and You apply them to our hearts at the point of our greatest need. We love You and we thank You and we commit ourselves anew to You. In Jesus's name, amen.