

Job: It Never Rains But It Pours

Job 2:1-10

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Job has lost everything! His livelihood, his possessions, and more poignantly, his childrens all ten of them in one swoop!

It is difficult to imagine a greater trial than that. But, Job's response has been breathtaking: he has responded by saying:

Naked I came from my mother's womb,
And naked I will depart.
The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away;
May the name of the LORD be praised. (1:21)

That was yesterday and today is "another day" (2:1).

It never rains but it pours, we say somewhat euphemistically. And that is certainly true here. Job may well have thought that the trials of chapter one were more than enough, but chapter two opens with a similar setting. Satan is reporting on his movements again, and again, God brings up the case of Job! "Have you considered My servant Job?" (2:3). Indeed he had! But even Satan may have been taken aback that he is to be given a second chance to attack Job, seeing as though he had failed even to make so much as a dent in Job's armor the first time around. "He still retains his integrity..." God says. Satan has been unsuccessful in getting Job to curse God!

This raises an interesting problem. It had been Job's fear that his sons might inadvertently "curse God in their hearts" (1:5) whilst engaged in a "period of feasting." That is why he had acted as a priest and offered sacrifices for them. Actually, the verb in the Hebrew is the verb "to bless" rather than the verb "to curse." This is because the writer did not want to put the word "curse" right next to the divine name of God! (Something similar happens in 1 Kings 21:10,13). He is using the word euphemistically. He wants you to understand that he is not afraid of them 'blessing' God, but of "cursing" Him. I think we should understand that something a little less than a curse is meant, after all, later in Old Testament history, to curse God was punishable by death (Lev. 24:15-16). Probably Job has

in mind something unintentional, something his sons would not have known they had done.

This use of the verb "to curse" (where the original is "to bless") occurs three more times, twice by Satan (1:11 and 2:5) and once by Job's wife (2:9). The writer, in these opening two chapters, wants us to understand that Job's fear for his sons will soon be tested *in his own case* as Satan suggests, and his wife urges, that he do the very thing he is afraid that his sons might have done.

Some trials will incite us to think evil of God. To think the unthinkable: that God doesn't know, doesn't understand, doesn't care! To think, as C. S. Lewis wrote in cold, analytical fashion in *A Grief Observed*, that God was the "cosmic sadist." That is what Satan wants us to do in our pain. To think bad thoughts about God.

But another disturbing phrase occurs now in chapter 2. God is interrogating Satan once more and has raised the specter of Satan's failure in round 1 to incite Job to curse God, even though God had acted against Job "without any reason" (1:3).

There appears to be a certain purposelessness about some trials. There is no traceable cause. They are devoid of any reason, any explanation that might give them some validity. And even though we can always resort to the suggestion that they are deserved because sin is always present to some degree, something which Job's friends will not tire of saying often and loudly this is palpably *not* the case here. God has told us that Job is "blameless and upright" (1:1; 2:3). Even in the wake of the first trial with all its horrendous consequences for Job's family, we are told: "In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing" (1:22).

What God is saying here is that Job suffered for no apparent reason. Many will find this deeply troubling. What keeps us going in dark times is the belief that somewhere, somehow, there lies a reason for all this that makes sense. The idea that providence may lack purpose and direction is not comforting. The idea that even God himself is subject to arbitrariness is a chilling thought indeed.

Two things need to be said in response: one, that this is not what God is saying, and two, that this is not what Scripture teaches.

Though God does say that Job's test had been "without any reason" it is only as far as perception goes that this is true. Sin had been the cause of Job's trial. There was no reason of sin and its consequences that explain why Job should suffer the way he did. But does this mean that there was no reason at all? That even God could not account for it? That somehow God had given in to irrationality and whim? Of course not. As the book of Job will make clear, there is always a reason behind everything that happens. Providence is never arbitrary. God works all things together for the good of those that love Him (Rom. 8:28). He works all things after the counsel of His will (Eph. 1:11). There are no 'black

holes" in the governance of God over the universe. His control is absolute.

But that is not to say that we can always comprehend the reason. More often than not we cannot. We are rest in the knowledge that God understands even when we do not.

I have a letter which I currently keep in one of my commentaries on Job from a friend which reads this way:

"I have pretty much given up trying to read providence, but I wonder if you are in one of those *hinnam*, 'without cause,' 'gratuitous' trials like your friend Job (2:3)..."

Some of life's troubles seem random and purposeless. They are not, of course; but they do appear that way. As Tennyson would say of the charge of the Light Brigade with all its tragic consequences:

*Their's not to reason why
Their's but to do and die:
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.*

It is a measure of Job's faith that in response to the *seeming* arbitrariness of what had happened he had responded the way he had.

But now there is to be a second wave of trials. This is "another day." And this time, Satan is given leave to afflict Job physically. Again, there is a boundary over which Satan cannot pass: he is to "spare his life" (2:6).

Health is a sensitive issue, particularly for Christians in North America. A casual observer might be forgiven for suggesting that the modern church views health as a "right" rather than a privilege. Most of our prayer meetings have become "organ recitals" as one health issue after another becomes the focus of our praying, at the expense of other issues like evangelism and discipleship. Sickness is sometimes thought to be in itself evidence of misshapen spirituality. We ought not to be sick! Forgetting folk like Timothy, Trophimus, Epaphroditus, and even Paul were sick and for no apparent reason other than they each one lived in a world that is fallen and misshapen and a regenerate heart has not yet ensured their transportation to the new earth where there will be no sickness (c.f. Rev. 22:1-5).

Job's malady (it appears to have been *elephantiasis*) is all the more graphically portrayed when the writer describes him scrapping off sores with bits of broken potsherd as he sat on the city's refuse pit (2:8). Later, Job's disease is described in even more detail. It includes such symptoms as: aching, rotting bones (30:17), dark (and peeling) skin (30:28, 30), wart-like eruptions (7:5), anorexia (19:20),

fever (30:30), depression (7:16; 30:15), insomnia (7:4), nightmares (7:14), putrid breath (19:17; cf. 17:1), failing vision (16:16), rotting teeth (19:20). Little wonder whenever Job's friends first meet at the close of this chapter, "they could hardly recognize him" (2:12)!

While the "Health and Prosperity Gospel" peddle their wares that include the assertion that it is never God's will for a Christian to be sick, the New Testament reminds us that some of God's choicest lived with pain all of their lives. Philip Hughes, commenting on this passage in 2 Corinthians 12, makes the following observation: "Is there a single servant of Christ who cannot point to some "thorn in the flesh," visible or private, physical or psychological, from which he has prayed to be released, but that has been given to him by God to keep him humble, and therefore fruitful?... Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' is, by its very lack of definition, a type of every Christian's 'thorn in the flesh.'"

Pain is a reality of living in this world. Sickness is something Christians can expect. We ought not to be surprised when we suffer ill health. After all, and it is a point which faith healing advocates always seem to forget, we are all of us going to die some day of some sickness or other, unless Christ returns to prevent it. Sickness is at work in each of us to some extent and we are to remember that.

But it is Job's response that steals all the thunder again. "Shall we not accept good from God, and not trouble?" (2:10). Job's understanding of God includes the idea that He can send trouble. His is not the view that when bad things happen, God isn't there! What possible comfort would be? What kind of God would that be? Right at the heart of the trouble is beating the heart of God.

What Job is saying that not only good things, but bad things can work together for our good. "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word" says the psalmist (Psa 119:67). The Christian will need winter times of afflictions if he is to experience spring times of blossoming.

Did you ever think about Mrs. Job in all of this? She too had experienced the same loss as her husband had. She too experienced the pain of losing her ten children. Unimaginable pain! And what Job has feared for his own children, she now openly encourages: "Curse God and die," she urges (2:9).

What did she mean?

According to Augustine, she was *diaboli adjutrix* s the devil's advocate!

According to Calvin she was *organum satani* s the tool of Satan!

And Aquinas had suggested that Satan had spared her in order to use her against her husband!

But, I wonder if you don't have some sympathy for her? Was she some "second Eve" tempting her husband to sin? Is she really so filled with anger and revenge that all she can now think of is doing God as much injury as possible?

Perhaps not. She may have seen that her husband is dying and she does not want him to suffer unduly, so she urges him to get it over with quickly by cursing God and suffering the consequences in some sort of instantaneous divine retribution. Whatever her exact intention, Job regarded her as "foolish," that is, as siding with unbelief rather than the way of faith. Wisdom, on the other hand, tries to make sense of trials by submitting to the providence of God rather than fighting against it.

Whatever Mrs. Job really felt, whatever her real intentions were, Job would not be turned aside from his desire to worship God in the midst of his trials.

The story of Horatio Spafford is well known. Having known financial disaster in the fires of Chicago in 1873, he sent his wife and four children to England aboard the ship S.S. *Ville de Havre*. Halfway across the Atlantic, it collided with another ship, the S.S. *Lochearn*. Over 200 people were drowned, including Spafford's four children. Upon reaching the shores of England, Mrs Spafford sent a telegram, which read, "Saved Alone." Her husband caught the next boat across in order to be with her and, it is said, when the boat stopped at the point where the sinking had occurred, Spafford wrote these lines:

When peace like a river, attendeth my soul,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
"It is well, it is well with my soul."

That is why James says of Job that he was "patient." He stood firm, he persevered, he endured the trial (Jam 5:11).

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