



Our Suffering & God's Sovereignty

The Story of Scripture – Part 2

If you have a Bible—and I hope you do—let me invite you to open with me to Job, chapter 1. It's good to be together around God's Word and it's good to be one week into our Bible Reading Plan together. So if you are just joining us, feel free to pick up one of these plans and jump in with us. We just read through the first nine chapters of Genesis and hopefully some—maybe many—worked on memorizing Genesis 1:27.

I want to put it on the screen in a minute so we can all read it together, but if you've memorized it, you can't look at the screen. Either close your eyes or look down. This will give everyone an opportunity to say this together and you an opportunity to practice if you've memorized it—and it will keep me honest to make sure I say it right. It works all the way around. Let's say Genesis 1:27: *“God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”*

Boom! Well done. Well, I don't know how many of you actually had your eyes closed or were looking down, but hopefully many of you did. We're basically memorizing a verse a week as we go through the Story of Scripture. This week it will be Genesis 15:6. All this—the Bible Reading Plan, memory verses, resources—is available on our website, mcleanbible.org.

I believe one of my primary responsibilities as your pastor is to teach and preach in such a way that the members of this church are prepared to suffer, because suffering is a reality for all of us. There are people all across this church who I know have suffered in ways I can't even begin to imagine. It's pretty overwhelming. I think about the 10,000 or so people who will gather with MBC today. I know many of you are suffering in a variety of ways. Some are suffering in light of things that just happened this last week, others from things that happened a long time ago. And there's the reality that any one of us could suffer this next week in a way that would totally shock us right now. I don't say this to be depressing—I say this to be real.

Some of you who are gathered here and in other places are not Christians, in part because you believe Christians live in some fantasy land of faith that ignores hard realities in the world. But I want to show you today that the Bible doesn't ignore hard realities in the world. The Bible addresses them from the start of history establishing a rock-solid foundation to stand on when the waves of this world come crashing in on us.

I'm concerned that many Christians don't have a rock-solid foundation to stand on when the waves of the world come crashing toward them. It's often in suffering that some of the worst theology comes out of people's mouths, even out of Christians' mouths. We say some of the most untrue things in the midst of trial. We're grasping for comfort, we're longing for explanations, yet we come to some very unbiblical conclusions, which means we find ourselves trying to stand on sinking sand.

What makes this really challenging is that in the midst of suffering is usually not the best time to correct thinking. When someone is weeping over the loss of a loved one and they say something that's totally unbiblical, that's definitely not the best time to pull out a sermon on suffering. This means all of us need to be prepared as best we can with biblical foundations before we enter into suffering.

Now, I'm not saying that simply knowing the Bible will make suffering easy. Nothing can totally prepare us for the shock of suffering when it hits. When you're going about your normal day and you get a call that something unexpectedly tragic has just happened to your spouse or child or parent, or when you finish your Bible reading in the morning and you're getting dressed, you notice a lump somewhere on your body that wasn't there the day before, in an instant your world turns upside down.

What I want to do today is help you be as ready as possible when you get that phone call or feel that lump or find yourself in that situation that you never could have imagined. I want to speak to you today from God's Word in a way that I pray will strengthen some of you who are walking through suffering right now, some of you who have been for a long time, and in a way that will prepare you for suffering that may be coming this week or this month or this year—or maybe many years from now. I hope I will speak to you in a way that those of you who are not Christians right now might hear the hope God desires you to have in a world of suffering.

I think about Frederick Douglass, whose narrative as a slave has had a prominent place in American history. He experienced and witnessed horrifying things. When he was eight years old, he remembers sleeping on the table, waking up one night and overhearing somebody reading the first chapter of Job out loud. He wondered how somebody could experience all that and still say, "Blessed be the name of the Lord."

So as he taught himself to read, he started exploring the Bible, then he ended up becoming a Christian and finding himself crying out one day in words that echoed Job: "Why was I born a man of whom to make a brute? The glad ship is gone. She hides in the dim distance. I'm left in the oddest hell of unending slavery. O God, save me. O God, deliver me."

I don't believe there's any book in the Bible that more clearly addresses the hard realities of suffering than the book of Job. By the way, the reason it's in our Bible Reading Plan during this first week, after Genesis 9, is because most biblical scholars believe that Job lived after the flood—there's a reference to the flood in Job 22—and then around or possibly before the time of Abraham, whom we'll read about this week. Again, we're reading through the Bible chronologically. Job is part of the wisdom

literature in the Bible, which is why it is placed about halfway through the Bible, but chronologically, it takes place at the very beginning of biblical history.

I want us to read Job 1 together, then I want us to meditate and reflect on what God is teaching us this week amidst the hard realities of suffering in the world. So let's pray.

God, You know what every single person in this room right now is walking through. You know all the details and You know what this next week holds, what this next month and year hold, for every single one of us. So we are asking You right now to speak to us through Your Word. We pray for rock-solid foundations to stand on. We pray that You would bring comfort and strength and hope through Your Word today. We pray that You might bring new life to some, maybe many, through Your truth today. With that anticipation, we read Your Word. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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. ² There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. ³ He possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys, and very many servants, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east. ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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.

⁶ Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. ⁷ The Lord said to Satan, "From where have you come?" Satan answered the Lord and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." ⁸ And the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" ⁹ Then Satan answered the Lord and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason? ¹⁰ Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. ¹¹ But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face." ¹² And the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand." So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.

¹³ Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, ¹⁴ and there came a messenger to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, ¹⁵ and the Sabeans fell upon them and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." ¹⁶ While he was yet speaking, there came another 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." ¹⁷ While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "The Chaldeans formed three groups and made a raid on the camels and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." ¹⁸ While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, ¹⁹ and behold, a great wind came across the wilderness and struck the four

corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they are dead, and I alone have escaped to tell you.”

²⁰ Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. ²¹ And he said, “Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

²² In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.

Let's reflect for a moment on our suffering and realize from the very beginning of Job that God's Word teaches us suffering is often undeserved, often unexpected, often unimaginable and always painful. I want to take these one by one.

When I say **suffering is often undeserved**, I want to be careful. God's Word also teaches that some suffering comes about as a direct result of our sin. When a spouse is unfaithful, that leads to all sorts of suffering in a marriage and in the children. When a person is hurtful, that leads to suffering. There are countless examples I could share of how sin leads to suffering.

The book of Job the Bible actually goes out of the way to show that Job's suffering was not a direct result of his or his family's sin. The author actually goes to great pains to show us, not Job's impurity, but his purity. He's described using four terms: blameless, upright, fearing God and shunning evil. Suffering is often undeserved.

Also, **suffering is often unexpected**. Job 1:13: "*Now there was a day...*" The language is so simple. It was a day just like any other day, when all of a sudden everything changed. We don't usually wake up in the morning expecting suffering to come crashing down on our lives. It's often unexpected **and often unimaginable**. The people Job worked with came to him, reporting the loss of his possessions, one after another after another. "While he was still speaking...while he was still speaking...while he was still speaking...." Then the climax of it all hits in an instant: all ten of his children were gone.

Then we get into Job 2 where a similar scene in heaven played out that led to Job being afflicted with pain across his body that the rest of the book describes as inflamed, ulcerated sores, itching, degenerative, changes in facial skin, loss of appetite, depression, loss of strength, worms in the boils, running sores, difficulty breathing, darkness under the eyes, foul breath, loss of weight, continual pain, restlessness, blackened skin, peeling skin and fever. By verse eight of chapter two, the man who used to sit in the respected seat in the city as judge found himself sitting in the dump with the beggars amidst trash and waste, scraping his itchy, running sores with a piece of broken pottery. In his deepest nightmares, Job could never have imagined this scene, which is often how suffering works. It has a surreal feel to it. "Is this happening? Somebody pinch me and wake me up from this nightmare."

Suffering is always painful. We can try to compare degrees of suffering, but the reality is suffering always hurts. We see this in Job 1:20, when all these things happen. The Bible says Job got up, tore his robe and shaved his head. That's an expression in the Bible of violent grief.

We need to see that the Bible doesn't in any way gloss over the pain of suffering. We're going to talk about the sovereignty of God, which Job knew about, but God's sovereignty did not make his suffering easy. God's sovereignty doesn't mean that loss isn't heavy and grief isn't hard. It is. In His Word, God doesn't call us to ignore the pain of suffering, to put on a spiritual face and pretend it's not there. God is not honored by attempts to hide the pain inside. God is honored in honest expressions of grief.

This means we should express real grief while also being careful not to sin. So how do we do that? How do you suffer without sinning, as described in Job 1:22? How do we suffer in a way that worships God and helps us stand instead of sinking in sand? This is the question the book of Job answers—not in an easy or trite way, but I want to show you how it does this. Turn now to the last chapter of Job, chapter 42.

Part of the challenge of reading the Bible like we are is we can just jump from the first chapter to the last chapter, forgetting the process that is found between Job 1-2 and Job 42. To summarize what we're jumping over, all the way through Job 37, Job agonizes with three supposed friends who, for the most part, feed him lies—the same kind of lies, by the way, that are being sold all over the world today under the guise of a so-called “prosperity gospel” which says, “If you have enough faith, good things will happen to you. So if bad things happen to you, it's because of something wrong with you.”

But then in Job 38, God speaks. God asks Job 64 questions, one after another after another, that give Job a glimpse of God he had never seen before. This is Job's response and conclusion in Job 42:1-6:

Then Job answered the Lord and said: ² “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. ³ ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. ⁴ ‘Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you make it known to me.’ ⁵ I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; ⁶ therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”

This is where I want to reflect and meditate on God's sovereignty amidst suffering. What does it mean to say God is sovereign? Here's a summary that comes straight from Job.

1. God's power is great.

First, Job realizes in his suffering that God's power is great. In Job 42:2 he says, “I know that you can do all things.” In the book of Job, 31 times God is referred to as the Almighty and part of what Job realizes by the end of the book is just how almighty God is. I wish we had time to look in depth where He shows Job that He is exactly what we saw in Genesis last week: the supreme Creator and Sustainer of all life.

God reigns with power over every single molecule and mystery in creation. The mystery of Job's suffering is connected to millions of other mysteries in the universe that ultimately God alone understands. This leads Job to realize that he has no place to instruct the holy God of the universe on how He should run the world, or worse, condemn God for the way He runs the world. Job finds confidence in the sovereign power of God—why?

The sovereign power of God shows us that God is in control. This is what Job was confessing way back in Job 1:21 when he fell on his face and said, *"The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away."* Job knew at that moment, even in the depth of his sorrow, that ultimately God was still in control, on the throne and this was a good thing.

Now, that also brings a host of agonizing "why" questions over the many chapters that followed, but in the end Job is reminded of what he said in the beginning. God has ultimate power over all things. And this is a really good thing, because if God is not in control, well then who is? Satan? Evil? Sin? Are they in control? No, the whole story of Job is written clearly to show us this next point.

The sovereign power of God reminds us that Satan is subordinate to God. Satan is active in wreaking havoc and evil in the world, but don't miss the point here from the start of the book: Satan is ultimately on a leash and God holds the reins. God is almighty—Satan, sin and evil are not. God is omnipotent—Satan, sin and evil are not. God is sovereign—Satan, sin and evil are not sovereign. This is not some picture of dualism like Star Wars, some battle between equal yet opposing forces of good and evil. This is not dualism—this is domination. The sovereign power of God shows that God is in control, and it reminds us that Satan is subordinate. What does that mean?

The sovereign power of God assures that suffering will conclude. This is why Job takes such comfort in the realization that God has all power and why you can find comfort in this realization. If God does not have power over the trials we face, then God does not have power to bring us through the trials we face. If in your attempts to understand your suffering you begin to minimize the sovereign power of God in your mind—saying, "Well, maybe God is not able to do this or that"—and you begin to doubt His ability and power, then what foundation do you have for faith in His promises to you?

If God doesn't have the power to keep His promises, what good are they? I can promise to protect you, but when someone ten times my strength comes at you and me, my promise, although well-meaning, will not stand. In the words of Romans 8:31, *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"* There is no one and nothing with more power than God. In the words of Frederick Douglass, "One and God make a majority." Ladies and gentlemen, God keeps His promises because God has all power. When God says in Romans 8:28, *"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose,"* you can bank your life on that promise, no matter what happens, because God has all power.

When you read in Revelation that one day suffering is going to end, sorrow is going to cease and God will wipe away every tear from your eyes, you can know it's true because God has all power to bring that promise to pass. The power of God is great. So I urge you, in the middle of suffering—amidst all the questions that flood your mind, some of which will never be answered this side of heaven—I urge you to stand firm on the foundation of God's great power over all things, even and especially the worst things. God's power is great.

2. God's purpose is guaranteed.

Our second truth is this that for God to be sovereign means that God's purpose is guaranteed. Job 42:2 says, *"I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted."* God has a purpose and it cannot be stopped. This is exactly what I just quoted from Romans 8:28, *"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."*

This is where I want to bring in Elihu. He is a guy who comes on the scene in Job 32-37. Turn to Job 27. At times Elihu seems like a pretty arrogant guy, but he also seems to be pretty sharp. He shows that Job's three friends were wrong in their assessment of Job's situation. He also shows how Job had been wrong in his own assessment. Elihu's speech ultimately set up God's address to Job in Job 38, and interestingly, when God rebukes Job's companions, He rebukes the other three friends, but not Elihu.

Much of Elihu's point revolves around what God is accomplishing in the midst of suffering. For example, in Job 37, Elihu begins by talking about how God brings the rain. Listen to what he says in verses 11-13, talking about God: *"He loads the thick cloud with moisture; the clouds scatter his lightning. They turn around and around by his guidance, to accomplish all that he commands them on the face of the habitable world. Whether for correction or for his land or for love, he causes it to happen."*

Did you follow that? God brings the rain, but sometimes for different purposes. Sometimes He brings storms to punish men, sometimes to nourish land and other times to show His love in this way or that way. The point is that God has a purpose, but sometimes His purposes are different. Look down to verse 23 where Elihu makes clear that although God's purposes may sometimes be different, they are all righteous and good. *"The Almighty—we cannot find him; he is great in power..."* Then he says, *"Justice and abundant righteousness he will not violate."* Based on Elihu's words, we see at least five different good purposes God sometimes has amidst suffering.

God uses suffering to refine our faith. Listen to Elihu's words in Job 33:29-30: *"Behold, God does all these things, twice, three times, with a man, to bring back his soul from the pit, that he may be lighted with the light of life."* Do you hear the purpose there? God uses suffering to save people, to restore people, to do a work in our hearts that brings us from darkness to light.

You may have noticed I'm a bit under the weather. I've been in bed literally all this week with the flu, up until today. So be glad there's a bit of distance between you and me right now. I was fine until Monday morning. This is the sickest I can remember being in the last 20 years. The irony was not lost to me in preparing this sermon on Job.

But in the middle of the week as I was lying there, I was watching a documentary on Martin Luther and was reminded of a quote from him. Amidst all the persecution and suffering he was facing in the Reformation, listen to these words from Luther: "As soon as God's Word becomes known through you, the devil will afflict you, will make a real doctor of you and will teach you by his temptations to seek and love God's Word. For I myself owe my papists" (the people who were persecuting him) "many thanks for so breaking, pressing and fighting me through the devil's raging that they have turned me into a fairly good theologian, driving me to a goal I never should have reached otherwise."

Luther said he was a better theologian because of Satan and those who persecuted him. God was using suffering to drive Luther more to God's Word, which in the end was a good thing. It's something we see all over God's Word. James 1:2-4 says, "*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*" Romans 5:3-4 encourages us with, "*We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.*" I could go to so many other places in the Bible that say the same thing. God uses suffering to refine our faith.

God uses suffering to reveal His glory. Listen to Elihu's words in Job 33:19-25:

¹⁹ Man is also rebuked with pain on his bed and with continual strife in his bones, ²⁰ so that his life loathes bread, and his appetite the choicest food. ²¹ His flesh is so wasted away that it cannot be seen, and his bones that were not seen stick out. ²² His soul draws near the pit, and his life to those who bring death. ²³ If there be for him an angel, a mediator, one of the thousand, to declare to man what is right for him, ²⁴ and he is merciful to him, and says, "Deliver him from going down into the pit; I have found a ransom; ²⁵ let his flesh become fresh with youth; let him return to the days of his youthful vigor."

Now listen to verse 26 in light of all this agony and pain: "*Then man prays to God, and he accepts him; he sees his face with a shout of joy, and he restores to man his righteousness.*" Did you see this? Man goes from sickness and pain, with no fulfillment in anything this world offers, and he's brought to rejoice in God in a way that nothing in this world can compare with. God uses suffering to show the futility of this world and the fulfillment that is found in relationship with Him alone. Not to mention that God reveals His glory, not just to us, but to others.

When I watch our sister Lucette in the church walking through cancer right now, seeing her with a confident smile on her face testifying to God's strength in her weakness, I see God's glory on display over and above everything this world offers. Which leads to a third purpose.

God uses suffering to teach us to rely on Him. Listen to Elihu's words in Job 34:14-15, talking about God: *"If he should set his heart to it and gather to himself his spirit and his breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust."* Elihu's point is clear: our very breath comes from God. We rely on God for everything in our lives and suffering leads us to look to and rely on Him.

Joni Eareckson Tada—you may have heard her story or read things she has written—spent most of her life as a quadriplegic. One of my favorite quotes from her is this:

I hope in some way I can take my wheelchair to heaven. With my new glorified body, I will stand up on resurrected legs and I will be next to the Lord Jesus. I will feel those nail prints in His hands and I will say, "Thank You, Jesus." He will know I mean it, because He will recognize me from the inner sanctum of sharing in the fellowship of His sufferings. He will see that I was one who identified with Him in the sharing of His sufferings. So my gratitude will not be hollow. And then I will say, "Lord Jesus, do You see that wheelchair over there? Well, You were right. When You put me in it, it was a lot of trouble. But the weaker I was in that thing, the harder I leaned on You. And the harder I leaned on You, the stronger I discovered You to be. I do not think I would have ever known the glory of Your grace, were it not for the weakness of that wheelchair. So thank You, Lord Jesus, for that. Now, if You like, You can send that thing off to hell.

God uses suffering to repent of and renounce all sin in our lives. When you hear this, you might wonder, "Now, wait a minute. I thought Job's suffering wasn't due to a particular sin in his life." That's true; it was not. But this is where Elihu is helpful, because, unlike Job's friends, he realizes that. At the same time, Elihu points out to Job the presence of sin all around us, the effects of sin all around us, even the propensity to sin in our suffering. Elihu says in Job 36:21, *"Do not turn to iniquity, for this you have chosen rather than affliction."* In other words, Elihu warns Job that even amidst his suffering, he must run from sin.

This makes sense when you really think about it. After all, suffering in the world is ultimately a result of sin in the world. We saw this last Sunday in Genesis 3. Even though Job's suffering is not attributable to any particular sin in his life, his suffering is attributable to the presence of sin in the world. So when Job experiences suffering, Elihu says he should hate sin all the more, because sin is the ultimate cause of suffering.

There are people all over this congregation right now who have walked or are walking through suffering that is not directly attributable to some sin in your life. Your cancer did not come from a particular sin in your life. So in that sense, it's not that you need to repent of sin that caused cancer. At the same time, even though it's not directly attributable to a sin in your life, if your suffering doesn't cause you to hate sin more than you did before, then you will likely miss part of God's design in

suffering. If you or I go through cancer or disease or this surgery or that illness or circumstance, and we still treat sin as casually as we did before, we're missing part of the point. Suffering is so horrible that it should cause us to hate sin all the more and cause us to want nothing to do with it.

So when someone you love passes away unexpectedly, when you live with chronic pain, when you experience any kind of suffering, let it drive you to an even more intense hatred for sin in this world and a deeper longing to be totally free from sin and all of its effects—to repent of and renounce sin with great force. If we walk through suffering and we still love sin, we are missing part of the purpose of God.

God uses suffering to lead us to our reward in Him. Isn't this Job's conclusion in Job 42:5-6? *"I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes."* The whole book culminates in the point where Job sees God in all His glory and finds his reward in Him. Suffering teaches us not to put all our hope in our health, because it will fail us, nor to put all our hope in our riches, for they will fail us. Do not put your hope in your job, in your house, your possessions. Don't even put your hope in people ultimately, because not one of them is guaranteed to be here tomorrow. Put your hope in God; He will never, ever fail you.

So I put these purposes of God in suffering before you. While we don't always know or understand all God is doing when we walk through certain things, hopefully these are some questions you can at least ask:

- What areas of your faith might God be refining through your suffering?
- How can you rely on God more as a result of your suffering?
- What is God revealing about Himself to you or others through your suffering?
- What sin do you need to repent of and renounce as you grow in your hatred for sin amidst suffering?
- And how can your suffering drive you to find deeper reward in God?

God always has a purpose and His purpose is guaranteed. That's what it means for Him to be sovereign.

3. God's knowledge is perfect.

While these last two points deserve more time, we're going to go through them fairly quickly, because I want to leave time to pray for each other. For God to be sovereign means that God's knowledge is perfect. In Job 42:3, Job quotes God, *"Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?"* He responds, *"Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."* In other words, Job says, "God, You know all things." He realizes at the end of this book that in the confusion of our circumstances, God is all wise.

I mentioned that Job is in a part of the Old Testament known as the wisdom books and I want you to see tucked away right near the center of this Book this focus on wisdom. As he wrestles with why

this has happened and is happening to him, Job realizes that behind it all, God is wise. Listen to what he says in Job 28:20-28:

²⁰ From where, then, does wisdom come? And where is the place of understanding? ²¹ It is hidden from the eyes of all living and concealed from the birds of the air. ²² Abaddon and Death say, "We have heard a rumor of it with our ears." ²³ God understands the way to it, and he knows its place. ²⁴ For he looks to the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens. ²⁵ When he gave to the wind its weight and apportioned the waters by measure, ²⁶ when he made a decree for the rain and a way for the lightning of the thunder, ²⁷ then he saw it and declared it; he established it, and searched it out. ²⁸ And he said to man, "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding."

Job realizes amidst the confusion of his circumstances that there are things he doesn't see and can't understand, but God sees and alone understands. It honors God when we trust His wisdom even as we ask God, "Why?" The book of Job is teaching us that pain on earth can only be ultimately understood from the perspective of heaven.

Just think about the way this story is told. At no point is Job let in on this conversation that's taking place in heaven. As a result, his only perspective is from the middle of the darkness that surrounds him. You and I, though, have a different perspective, one that helps us understand this whole picture of what's happening. We know that Job is blameless before God. We know that at the end of the story, Job will eventually be restored. But Job doesn't know any of this. In the same way, whenever we walk through suffering, we, like Job, always have a limited perspective.

I'm not saying that any time we suffer that God has had a conversation with Satan about our lives like He did here about Job. But the reality is that no matter what happens in our suffering, our perspective will always be an earthly one. We will always see pain on this level. The sovereignty of God reminds us that there is another whole perspective. It's the perspective of the God Who is all-wise and all-loving toward His people, with all power in all the universe. "Why is this happening to me?" we might ask, and the answer may not be found on this earth.

Just imagine the perspective of Job's suffering from heaven. There stands Satan, surrounded by 10,000 angels, accusing Job of false worship, saying, "God has to pay people to worship Him." God responds, "You may do all these things to Job under My sovereignty," and Satan does. He strikes down Job's oxen and donkeys, his sheep and camels, his servants, then his children. A hush comes over heaven, as God and Satan and 10,000 angels wait in silence to hear Job's response. Job falls on his face and worships, saying, "The Lord gave and the Lord took away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." And unbeknownst to Job, all of a sudden, 20,000 arms are raised and 10,000 mighty voices shout out, "Worthy is the God of Job," and Satan goes running out of God's presence. This is the perspective of heaven.

So the question for all of us is, “Will we praise God when we’re suffering amidst the mysteries of this earth? Will we trust God with the sovereign perspective of heaven?”

I can’t preach Job without thinking about my dad and that moment when I got a call from my younger brother, saying, “Pray for Dad. I don’t know what’s wrong. Pray for Dad.” I began to plead for my dad, my best friend in the world. Close to an hour later—as I was praying and crying and weeping—I got a call from my older brother saying, “Dad is gone.” I hung up the phone, praying, “God, I pray for faith to trust You. This is not easy, but I am trusting that You are all-wise. You have all power. You have all knowledge.”

4. God’s mercy is personal.

God is not just wise and powerful—He is good, which is the final truth here. God’s mercy is personal. Just think of how this book is structured. From the beginning and for so many chapters, we see a picture in Job of what we all want in our suffering—an explanation from God. The question “Why?” is asked at least 25 different times in the book. It’s the same question we ask. When we experience suffering in our lives or when we see suffering in other’s lives, we ask “Why, God? I don’t understand why.” So in the majority of the book of Job we’re asking that question.

Finally we get to the end of Job and God speaks. We are ready for His answer. And what do we get? We get 64 questions from God—64 questions that reveal Who God is. What we want in our suffering, like Job, is an explanation from God. What we receive in our suffering is a revelation of God, which is what we need most. Our greatest need in suffering is not an explanation from God, but the revelation of God’s power, wisdom, goodness, strength, peace and presence with us.

As soon as I say that, some of you might think, “What do you mean, my greatest need is a revelation of God’s presence? I’d rather have an explanation.” But would we really? Think about it this way. I think of times when I’ve broken a bone and gone to the ER, writhing in pain. In those moments, did I need a doctor to come and show me the x-ray and give me the explanation of how the wrist broke and why I’m hurting. No. I want him to give me something to help me with the pain.

Think about it another way. If I’ve learned anything in my marriage, I’ve learned that when my wife is going through difficult times, what she needs most is not explanations from me. She needs my presence, my love and support alongside her. And this, ladies and gentlemen, this is the ultimate point of the book of Job. We do not have a God Who is distant from us in the heavens, doling out philosophical explanations for why suffering exists. He’s not showing us an x-ray machine, giving us medical explanations for why we’re writhing in pain. Instead, we have a God Who at every moment in our suffering is with us.

This is the astounding truth of the Bible. God is not distant from this world and all of its pain. God has come to be with us. God Himself has entered into this world of sin and suffering in the Person of

Jesus, like us in every way, yet without sin. Are you broken? He was broken. Are you rejected? He was rejected. Are you hurting? He hurt. Do you cry out because you feel like you just can't take it anymore? He was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3). Do you wonder why? Hear His words on the cross: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Mark 15:34).

At the center of the Bible is a God Who came to be with us in our suffering, Who came to pay the price for sin that is the root of all suffering. After He died on the cross for your sin and my sin, He rose from the grave in victory and He told His disciples, "I will be with you always." No matter what you're going through today, what you will go through tomorrow, know this: you are not alone. You are never alone. At every moment in our suffering, God is with us—and at every moment in our suffering, God is for us.

You've got to hear just one last passage in Job. From the start of chapter three, Job is in the depths of despair. He's depressed. He wants his life to end. It builds chapter after chapter after chapter, until chapter 19 where Job feels totally deserted. He has no one. His wife has told him to curse God. He feels hopeless. Listen to his words of despair in Job 19, beginning in verse 13:

¹³ He has put my brothers far from me, and those who knew me are wholly estranged from me. ¹⁴ My relatives have failed me, my close friends have forgotten me. ¹⁵ The guests in my house and my maidservants count me as a stranger; I have become a foreigner in their eyes. ¹⁶ I call to my servant, but he gives me no answer; I must plead with him with my mouth for mercy. ¹⁷ My breath is strange to my wife, and I am a stench to the children of my own mother. ¹⁸ Even young children despise me; when I rise they talk against me. ¹⁹ All my intimate friends abhor me, and those whom I loved have turned against me. ²⁰ My bones stick to my skin and to my flesh, and I have escaped by the skin of my teeth. ²¹ Have mercy on me, have mercy on me, O you my friends, for the hand of God has touched me! ²² Why do you, like God, pursue me? Why are you not satisfied with my flesh?

Do you hear it? Why? Why? Why? Everybody else is gone. In the midst of his despair, though, at this point, we see one of the most triumphant declarations in the entire book. Listen to what he says in the depths of his despair:

²³ Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! ²⁴ Oh that with an iron pen and lead they were engraved in the rock forever! ²⁵ For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. ²⁶ And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, ²⁷ whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!

In the depths of his despair, Job cries out, "I do have hope. I don't have all the answers." So many questions were swirling in Job's mind, just like they are in ours. Yet one thing he knows: "I have a Redeemer, a Rescuer, Who lives." And in the end this is not the end. "This is not the end," Job cries. "This is not the end. In the end, He will stand and He will deliver me after my skin has been destroyed."

There's something after your cancer, your pain, your loss, your grief. "After that, in my flesh, I will see God. I will see Him with my own eyes and not another. How my heart longs within me!"

To every man, woman, student, child, in a world of sin and suffering—no matter how hard it gets, no matter how dark it gets—always know you have a Redeemer Who lives. His name is Jesus. He lives. At the end, He will stand upon the earth and all who trust in Him will see His face. So trust in Him.

Non-Christian friend or family member here today, trust in Him. I urge every person within the sound of my voice: trust in Him. Do not bank your hope on this world. Bank your hope on the God Who is over this world, Who has made a way for you to have the assurance of eternal life with Him forever. That cancer, disease, sickness, suffering and death can never take away from you.

Christian brothers and sisters, trust in Him and don't stop trusting in Him. His power is great, His purpose is guaranteed, His knowledge is perfect and His mercy is personal. Trust in Him today and tomorrow, knowing that one day you will see His face and you will be free from suffering. We know this, why? Because God is sovereign, period.

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