

September 9, 2007
 Genesis 50:15-21 / Psalm 40:1-5 / Job 42:7-17
 A New Beginning

We began our trek through Job on January 8th of 2006 (over 1 and ½ years ago)! And now, 42 chapters later, we come to the conclusion of the book!

Last week was what I would call the "culmination" of the book — the "climax of it all," where we find God's sovereignty vindicated, Job's question answered, and his lesson learned: "God," he says, "can do all things, no plan of His can be thwarted."

For 41 chapters Job struggled because the reason for his plight was rooted in the invisible realms of the unseen world and had nothing to do with something he had done wrong in this visible, seen world.

We knew that part of the story but he didn't. The Bible gave us that insight in the first two chapters, but it wasn't until chapter 41 that God clued Job into what we already knew.

In fact, as bystanders who could see the whole picture that was withheld from Job, there were times I wished that God had filled him in on the part he didn't know — like how much God loved and favored him, and how he chose him for the task of suffering precisely because he was the best man God could find for the task.

We must never forget that it was God who brought Job to Satan's attention! "Have you considered my servant Job," said God. "There is no one on earth like him, blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil."

If only Job had known that! If only he was privy to the information we were given from the very beginning of the book! If only he'd known how special he was to God — that God counted him to be the most godly man alive; cream of the crop; His specially trained and specifically chosen soldier called to a mission of suffering for his King because no other soldier was capable of handling with such competency. It would have made his suffering so much easier to endure.

It would have lessened his tendency to get mad at God. He wouldn't have needed to ask why, he would have known why!!! And he may have avoided all the pitfalls and errors he was later to fall into (and would need to repent for), because he, like us, would have known exactly what was going on and why he was suffering.

He could have held on more staunchly, and courageously, and honorably, and gloriously. His testimony would have been so much more stellar, if only God would have shared with him the information He clued us into in chapters 1 and 2. But he didn't.

And the same is true for us. When we suffer God rarely clues us in to exactly why. We can't see or hear councils that take place in the unseen world. Like Job we are also unsure of why suffering comes our way causing questions to arise, followed by doubts and fears and confusion and disillusionment and maybe, as with Job, anger at God.

Which means that like him we also could suffer and endure so much better; we could suffer so much more nobly, if we could only see all the factors involved. If we only knew and understood why, and could therefore know that our suffering was "according to God's will."

That Satan was putting us to the test. That the extent of our suffering is limited by God's sovereign decrees. That God was allowing it, yet limiting it, and giving us the opportunity to glorify Him in it!

Francis Shaffer summarizes it so well when he writes in a sermon entitled "What was Job's Mistake?"

"Job did not have the curtain withdrawn, as the reader does, to see the supernatural portion of the struggle. Real history involves both the seen and unseen, often in a cause and effect relationship. When trouble comes, therefore, just because it seems irrational to us [with no viable, logical explanation] does not mean it is. Job's suffering seemed to come upon him purely by chance, but it didn't. There was a rational reason for it, rooted in the unseen world. The Bible reminds us that there is a revolt in the unseen world which can affect us. The Devil is at war with God. We should not be surprised, then, if at certain times this means that our suffering has a cause in the unseen world also."

Yet, isn't that exactly what this book does do for us? Does it not clue us in to the things we need to know to suffer well? Does it not clue us in to the fact that heavenly decisions HAVE been made / That Satan CANNOT touch us unless God permits it / That our suffering IS LIMITED by the stipulations God lays down / and that Satan IS HOPING we'll dishonor God in our suffering, and curse Him to His face, just as he had hoped Job would?

Does this book not clue us in to the fact that EVERYTHING happens for a reason even if we are not informed by God as to what those reasons may be?

You see, that's one of the main things we need to get into our heads from the Book of Job. Things happen for a reason! This is a rational universe because it's governed by a rational, all-knowing, all-wise and all-powerful God!

Life isn't random! It isn't left to chance—although it often seems that way to us. And although the supernatural decrees and divine logic behind our suffering is often hidden from us, it doesn't mean they haven't been made or that there's no divine rational for it.

In fact, there are many times when I have known for a fact (and I'm sure others here have as well) that Satan is stirring things up! Relationships go awry over nothing! Sane people do crazy things for no explicable reason whatsoever! Seemingly out of nowhere things that were going well all of a sudden go absolutely haywire! (Isn't that what happened with Job?)

You're cruising along in life (just like Job), with everything going wonderfully, and all of a sudden it's like you hit an invisible brick wall, and life comes crashing down all around you, leaving you in utter confusion as you struggle to get back on your feet and figure out what the heck has happened!

So, that's the **FIRST** thing we need to see from this book. Satan's greatest tool is his anonymity. He works best in secret! He loves the fact that Westerners in general don't even believe he exists, because he does the greatest damage and wreaks the most havoc when he can keep people unaware of his presence, ignorant of his devices, and oblivious to his intentions to stir up hatred, bitterness and dissension between individuals and nations.

His objective is to stir up crime, violence, war, destruction and enslave people to addictions. He works especially hard to destroy marriages and separate families, as well as provoke rebellion against what is good, and right and true, and instigate hatred for what is pure, and virtuous, and holy, and noble!

And he especially delights in dividing churches and getting Christians to fight among themselves over the most trivial and petty of things — thereby proving the onlooking world that we don't have the answer they're looking for! That we're part of the problem and not the solution!

This book assures us that Satan usually does not do his work in an outwardly evil and overt way! He rarely gets "in your face," so to speak — because he works best when you're not even aware he's at work at all — stirring up pride, anger, dissension, self-pity, resentment,

unforgiveness, self-righteousness, sinful urges, immoral cravings and sensual desires — spawning doubt, ruining trust, robbing us of hope, and primarily getting our eyes off Jesus. He wreaks the MOST havoc and does the MOST damage when he remains invisible, and imperceptible, behind the scenes, even using other people to do his dirty work (like he did in Job’s case with the Sabeian raiding parties and Chaldean marauders). He works best when people are convinced it isn’t even him that’s at work!

That’s why Paul is quick to remind the people of God, “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood” (its not people who are the enemy!) But rather, as he goes on to tell us, “We struggle against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” — “against the devil’s schemes,” as he states earlier in the passage.

If you have learned nothing else from Job, at least take that much away with you! When havoc strikes, and dissension reigns, and confusion abounds, love grows cold, and marriages or families are under attack, the Devil is at work! You can’t see him and I can’t point him out, but he’s at work all the same, just like he was working behind the scenes in all Job’s afflictions the whole time he was suffering—even getting Job to resent and yell at God for things Satan himself was doing.

GOD allows it, making Him, in a sense, the ultimate cause. He brought Job to Satan’s attention. He gave Satan permission to afflict him. He decreed the limits Satan must abide by, and thus He was, in a sense, the ultimate cause.

Job’s friends and family members declare that in unison in verse 11 where we are told: “They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the LORD had brought upon him.” Being convinced of the Absolute Sovereignty of God which Job declared in verse 2, they knew none of it could have happened had God not given Satan permission to touch him.

SATAN then stirred up the hearts and minds of sinful people (Sabeian raiders and Chaldean marauders) making him the primary instrumental cause.

And by using **PEOPLE** and the **WEATHER** to actually carry out the actual evil deeds, Satan made those things the immediate secondary cause — showing Paul was right — flesh and blood are not the real enemy.

Which brings us to the **SECOND** point we must never forget from the Book of Job. The message it gives to every sufferer—which is this: Hard as it is to believe (and it is hard!) God wants us to know He is in control, even when the things of life seem out of control. His plan is being carried out and cannot be thwarted by anyone, even when everything we see seems to imply His plan for us is being thwarted, and everything is unraveling.

And though it's so very hard to accept, what was true for Job is often true for us: His unthwartable plan for our lives, like Job, sometimes includes suffering. Suffering was part of God's plan for Job's life, and it is sometimes part of His plan for our lives as well. We don't like it. We kick and scream against it. Many do everything to deny it. But sometimes it is true. It has to be if you put any stock at all in the authenticity of the Book of Job!

But don't get it wrong! If your one called to suffer for a season it doesn't mean He loves any less those whom He calls to suffer. As we've seen before it simply means that for reasons known only to Him, He has ordained that certain saints suffer for a season as a means of learning and growing / being pruned and purified / of nurturing faith and keeping us close to Him and dependent upon Him / and as a means of being an example of to the onlooking world by suffering honestly, transparently, and well.

Hard as it is to accept, the Book of Job assures us that sometimes God's call, for some of His people, is to suffer well. We even see that in Revelation where He says to the church at Smyrna:
"I tell you the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for 10 days, Be faithful even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life."

He says the same to the church at Pergamum: *"I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name and did not renounce your faith in me even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives."*

The call of God on the lives of some of his saints, is not only to suffer, but hopefully to suffer well. To suffer faithfully. Anyone can live faithfully when God blesses everything they do. But it takes a unique person to live faithfully when their life is filled with suffering.

In fact, some of the people I've admired most in my life have been those who have suffered well — inexplicably well! Speaking of heaven as if they couldn't wait to get there! Telling people how good God was. Continuing to have a meek spirit, fervent in prayer, lighthearted in spirit, full of

faith and giving people hope and making people smile even as they languished on their deathbed wracked in pain!

They were a light in the darkness and a messenger of hope in a pessimistic world—more “alive” as they lie there dying, than many young people in the prime of life who had never suffered a day in their lives but are ungrateful, bitter, pessimistic, angry people.

How did they do it? *They kept their eyes on Jesus. He was their treasure, not earthly treasures, or healthy bodies, or length of days, but Jesus! And where one’s treasure is there will be their heart also!*

How could the early martyrs face death in the coliseum smiling and singing praise to God as the lions were making them their dinner?

They knew what we often lose sight of — The fact that as Christians this is NOT our home! We’re only sojourners passing through on our way to our true and eternal home where there will be no pain, or tears, or sin, or suffering any more!

We need to constantly heed what Peter tells us: We are only “strangers and aliens in this world”— citizens of heaven living for only a short while on this earth. Temporal people with an eternal perspective. People who aren’t so glued to this world that we expect to experience utopia in the here and now or somehow think this life is all there is to life!
(An error I’m convinced all too many Christians have fallen prey to.)

When I was growing up it used to be said of some Christians that they were “So heavenly minded they did no earthly good.” I think today (in our materialistic, consumer-driven world) we face the opposite problem, “Christians today are often so earthly minded they do no heavenly good.” They’re too focused on and enslaved to the things of this world.

Then **THIRD**, the Book of Job has taught us that God allows suffering for a reason—and we’ve looked at many possible reasons. But I need to stress that God would not allow it if there was not a reason for it. In fact, as I was reading I Peter this week I came across a verse in chapter 4 that makes the most interesting assertion in regard to why God may allow us to suffer in this life.

Peter says this (and I believe it applies to the Book of Job as well) in I Pet. 4:1:

“Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil (or sinful) human desires, but rather, for the will of God.”

You see, there is just something about suffering that diminishes the lure and appeal of sin, and loosens sin's grip on the life of a believer. It causes us to look at the deep things of life / and the ultimate issues of life, instead of the trivial, materialistic, purely sensual things of life.

The one who suffers (or comes close to death), often looks at life in a whole new way. They realize that they once cherished and lived for things that "are all gonna burn anyway" (as Saint Chap is fond of saying)!

The person who has never suffered tends to focus on the things of this life alone. They've never gone so far down they've had no place to look but up.

But the one who has suffered sees how fragile life really is / has a different outlook on life / sets different priorities and focuses more on things that will last. They don't tend to cling so tightly to "things that will pass away," or that "moth and rust corrupt, and robbers break in and steal."

And after telling us how suffering actually breaks the hold of sin in our lives, Peter summarizes his whole section on suffering with these words:

"So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good." (1 Pet. 4:19)

Now I stress that today, because the end of this book can be very misleading if a person takes Job's experience to be a "blueprint" of what all sufferers can expect from God — that is if they hope their suffering will be followed by the acquisition of immense material wealth. Though I hope and trust that everyone here is wise enough and mature enough to know that's just not true.

The message of this chapter is NOT that "all who suffer loss will be blessed with double what they had before they suffered that loss" — be it health, or wealth or children! That's NOT the message God wants us to get from the conclusion of this book (though it is what many hope for— something of a "payback" for all that they've had to suffer).

Francis Shaffer wisely pointed that out in the message I mentioned before:

"Do we live in a moral universe?... Is evil punished? Are wrongs made right? We do live in a totally moral universe because God is totally moral. Make no mistake, God will judge. However, the Bible makes it very plain that the books are not always balanced in this life. When Job stood shouting at God, he was really saying, "Why aren't you balancing the books now, God?" In Job's case the books were balanced in this life in the end.

Sometimes in my case and in yours this may happen; but often it won't. That doesn't change the message of the word of God. We are to be consistent in our Christian thinking. We are not to shout at God because the books are not balanced in this life."

He's right. The books WILL be balanced, though not always in this life. And when they are, far from simply receiving double for all they have suffered or missed out on in this life for suffering "according to God's will," believers will receive more than they dreamed possible!

"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor the mind of man conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him." says Paul. "Our light and momentary trials," he tells us, "are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all."

NOT ALWAYS IN THIS LIFE, but His promise is sure, WE WILL RECEIVE ABUNDANTLY MORE THAN WE COULD EVER THINK OR IMAGINE. IT'S GUARANTEED! And if we believed it we would be enabled to suffer so much better — with faith, and hope, and perseverance, and courage and honor.

Then **LAST** the Book of Job brings us to the end of one chapter in Job's life and the beginning of another—a whole new beginning in life. Healed, restored, refreshed, blessed with double for all he had lost — God's permission to afflict Job revoked, the hedge of divine protection erected and set in place once again, and the evil one bound from ever afflicting him again.

And here's the hard part — we would wish that were true in the case of EVERY saint — but it's not. Some saints are restored to health, do prosper once again, are blessed with many more years, and double (or more) than what they had before they ever suffered.

But that's not true of all. For some (like Job) the books ARE balanced in this life. For others they must wait for glory — though our preference would be to receive it in the now!

But despite the fact that we can't all expect the same vindication and restoration Job received — at least not in this life and not to the degree Job received it — there is a sense in which such vindication usually does come... in some way and to some degree.

In my life (and I'm sure in yours as well) times of suffering are almost always followed by times of restoration and renewal — if like Job we'll just hang in there. If we'll just persevere. If we'll just learn the lessons God is trying to teach us and for which he allowed the trial in the first place.

I had allowed one Scriptural truth to so dominate my thinking, that it blinded me to another equally important Scriptural truth! And so like Job, I yelled at God, resented God, and took my anger out on God.

I even mentioned at the Conference I spoke at in Massachusetts this Spring that at one point, about 4 months after we arrived back here in the States, Nancy came in Elisabeth bedroom one Sunday afternoon to find me lying in a bed, tears streaming down my cheeks.

“What’s wrong,” she asked. And looking around to make sure none of the kids were around, I said: “I hate God.”

And at the time I did, because I blamed Him for all I was going through — not simply for permitting it, but for actually inflicting the pain I was suffering... almost like I was a puppet and He was the one sticking pins into me! (With Job it was arrows! Job 16)

And you know what has helped deliver me from that misconception? Preaching through this book! I had fallen into the same trap Job did. I had lost sight of the fact that it was Satan and not God who was afflicting me. I was even tempted to give up on the ministry altogether — for how can one preach when they hate the God they are proclaiming?

Yet you know what kept me keeping on? The assurance this book gives us that trials are for a purpose / that they are not to punish but to test / not to torture but to purge and purify. The assurance that God permits even those He dearly loves to be buffeted severely by Satan / that our sufferings weaken sin’s lure and strengthen us to bear up under future trials.

They make us more like Jesus if we’ll just look to Him in faith, and refuse to take our eyes off Him as we persevere through them. / And most of all this book gives us the assurance that suffering is almost always followed by a time of refreshing and restoration and blessing, or a chance to begin afresh.

NOT the doubling of riches and material things, but the impartation of a stronger resolve, a more accurate perspective on God and life, a renewed inner fortitude, a greater understanding of God’s wisdom and mercy — and most of all that He has a plan for our lives! An unthwartable plan which includes forming and shaping and molding us into the image and likeness of Jesus — often by the very means we so despise — suffering!

If Jesus Himself “learned obedience by the things that He suffered,” (Heb. 5:8) who are we to think we can learn it without it?

So I say to any who may be suffering — Take heart! Don't give up! Keep on plugging! Commit yourself to your faithful Creator and keep on doing good. Job did not receive a new beginning in the end merely to give the story a happy ending!

He received it to assure God's people that when His purpose for permitting our suffering is completed, we too will be restored, and like him receive a similar chance to start all over again, and again and again!

For His mercies ARE new every morning, great is His faithfulness!