

This morning we are going to be reading from the Old Testament book of Job. Maybe you have said or heard the phrase “She has the patience of Job.” Well that phrase is actually a misinterpretation of a phrase in the Bible.

The term “patience of Job” comes out of the New Testament book of James and that is not the best interpretation of the term used. A better interpretation of what James says is “the endurance of Job.” Patience and endurance are words with different connotations.

Today we are going to be reading from a book which will be about a man who endures suffering that God seems to have a hand in allowing to happen. If you are someone who has endured a lot of pain and suffering in your life, then this reading from Job may be speaking to you. If you have ever asked the question, “why is faith in God important?” or “what difference does it make to believe in God?” then the book of Job may be a book that has something to say to you.

The book of Job is part of a group of Old Testament books called Wisdom Literature which includes the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. Wisdom Literature is not interested in Israel and its history. There is nothing in the book of Job that ties this book into historical events or categories. Wisdom Literature is focused on trying to address deeper questions of faith that people ask.

So let’s begin by reading the first 5 verses of the book of Job to learn about the man named Job.

Read Job 1:1-5

Job would be labeled a success story by our standards. He has what appears to be the perfect family. He has a wife and 7 sons and 3 daughters. He is very successful in business as he is described as having lots and lots of inventory. He has lots of servants as well. Job is a self-made millionaire with the perfectly beautiful family.

Job did not get to his success by immoral or unethical means. He is described as the most blameless and upright man in the kingdom. He is described as a very religious man. He does not do evil and he follows God.

Job reminds me of a successful business person that attributes all of his financial and family success to his faith in God. I think about people like Truett Cathy, the founder of Chick-Fil-A, who is very outspoken about his Christian faith and his business success. Cathy says that his faith and business success are closely connected.

Job and his family know what to do with all of their wealth. They hold fancy parties and invite lots of people to attend. And then after the parties are over Job makes it a point to find time to worship God and donate what is left over. If there was ever someone who was a model of success and faith it is Job. But then his life takes a very dark turn.

Read Job 1:6-8

I want to stop right here and talk about who Satan is in this story. In this story, Satan is not identified as the personification of evil. We have to look to the New Testament to find the name "Satan" being identified with the "devil." Satan's name in this story from Job means "adversary" and he is part of the heavenly court. The heavenly court in this story is a group of heavenly beings with God in charge.

As I share this information don't try to overthink this. Again, this is wisdom literature and the story of Job is probably not a historical story. It is more like a novel told to make a point. In the story of Job, the character called Satan basically functions as the prosecutor for the court. And what is disturbing about this story is that God seems to plant in the mind of Satan that Job is someone that he should go after as a prosecutor.

Read Job 1:9-12

Are you as disturbed by the way the story is presented where Satan makes his case to God and God seems to think about it and says, “OK Satan. Do as you wish. Just don’t kill Job.” But then the story becomes even darker.

Read Job 1:13-19

Everything that Job has now is taken away from him. All of his wealth? Gone. All of his servants? Gone. All 10 of his children? Killed in a terrible crash. And now we see Job’s response to all of this terrible tragedy.

Read Job 1:20-22

But losing all of his wealth and receiving news of the death of his children is not the end for Job.

Read Job 2:7-10

I hear people say that bad things happen in threes. Well if that is the case then Job got his 3. He lost his wealth. He lost his children. And then he was afflicted with a terrible disease. Job’s friends then show up. They show really good care at first because they sit with Job and do not say a word for 7 days. These friends are present with him and offer him support.

But then these friends open their mouths and tell Job that all of these bad things happened to Job because Job must have done something wrong. Because if Job was faithful then he would still have the very successful business. If Job was faithful then he would still have his 10 children. If Job was faithful he would not have this terrible skin disease. That is what his friends conclude. And understandably, Job is pissed.

Job did nothing wrong but he suffers these horrible and cruel experiences. And God allows it all to happen.

One of the questions that the book of Job attempts to answer is the question of why is faith in God important. Why is it important to have faith in God? Why is it important to have faith in a God who allows bad things to happen to good people? Why is it important to have faith in a God who allows good people to face tragedy?

There is a popular myth in our culture that our faith in God should lead to material and family success. There is a myth in our society that if we have faith in God then we will see results on earth of rewards from God for our faithfulness. The book of Job responds to that belief by saying that faith in God does not equal material and family success.

So if faith in God doesn't lead to material and family success, then why in the heck should we have faith and trust in God? Why should we have faith in God when we don't necessarily see results? I think I saw on Friday why faith is important.

I was invited on Friday to visit with David and Emma Jane Riddle. David Riddle is a retired Presbyterian pastor and clinical psychologist who has been worshipping at Allison Creek for several years. David is a brilliant man who has been such a blessing as a pastor and therapist to so many. Emma Jane continues to teach at Winthrop even though she is hobbled by a knee brace that slows her down.

A few months ago the incredible brain inside of David's head was diagnosed with brain cancer. It has impacted him greatly so that he now sleeps most of the day in his bed. I went by to see him on Friday and we talked for a while. Emma Jane came in and sat on the bed beside him. And then she propped her leg on the bed beside his body.

David then shared these words. "You know. We've been married for 45 years. It's days like this when we are here for each other during the most difficult of days is why I am glad we are still married." Faith in God is not about the honeymoon. Faith in God is about trusting God to be there during the most difficult and trying of days.

Having faith in God does not equal financial success. Having faith in God does not equal family success. Having faith in God does not mean that we will see results from God. There are some preachers out there who will tell you differently but they don't preach out of the entire book of Job.

Having faith in God is what we are invited to have. And if you want an example of why faith in God is important then I invite you to sit beside a brilliant man dying of brain cancer with his equally brilliant and crippled wife by his side.

That is what faith looks like and that is why faith in God is important to have. AMEN.

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