

REMINDER #3 REGARDING EVIL AND SUFFERING—
GOD’S PURPOSES FOR OUR SUFFERING ARE OFTEN NOT IMMEDIATELY KNOWN

INTRODUCTION

Because evil and suffering is such a part of our daily lives in the world we live in, it is sometimes difficult to fathom that it will someday cease to exist. We’ve learned that God’s plan to rid the world of evil and suffering is comprised of two parts—the crucifixion of Christ and the return of Christ.

The crucifixion and resurrection of Christ are God’s remedy for the **eternal** consequences of sin. Although we are sinful and undeserving of heaven, we can have the assurance of being forgiven when we put our faith and trust in Jesus’ shed blood as the payment for the penalty of our sins. It doesn’t take us long to realize, however, that freedom from the penalty of sin and freedom from the presence of sin are not the same. There is still evil in the world—and there is still evil in us.

Part 2 of God’s plan—the return of Jesus to earth—starts in motion the beginning of the end of evil and suffering. Jesus will defeat His enemies during the Tribulation, He will pronounce their doom at the Great White Throne Judgement, He will once and for all destroy death, and He will deliver the kingdom to the Father. The eternal state will begin and we will be free from the curse, free from death, free from evil, and free from suffering.

But we don’t know when that will occur, do we? So what are we to do in the mean time? What are some reminders that can help us as we wait for God to set all things right and make all things new?

Reminder #1—God’s Performance of Goodness and Justice is Superior to ours. How thankful we ought to be that God blesses us with goodness that we don’t deserve—and holds back punishment that we do deserve. Last week we look at Reminder #2—God’s Place as Creator is Superior to ours. The marvelous display of His wisdom and power when He spoke the world into existence ought to both humble us—and make it easy for us to trust Him.

Reminder #3—the one we will look at this morning—is the fact that *God’s Purposes for our Suffering are Often not Immediately Known*. **Paul** knew why he suffered—“And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure” we read in II Cor 12:7. **Joseph**, too, saw how God brought good out of him being sold by his brothers. In Genesis 50:20 we read, “But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.”

We don’t always know why, though, do we? Sometimes we find out well after the fact why God allowed a trial in our lives—and sometimes we still don’t know and hold out hope that we will find out in the future. Take your Bibles and turn to Job 1, beginning with verse 1, then 6-11. 4 points:

1. The Absence of Job
2. The Arguments of Job
3. The Arrogance of Job
4. The Answer from God

1. The Absence of Job

When reading the book of Job, it is important to remind ourselves that Job was **absent** from the conversation that took place between God and Satan and consequently was ignorant of what was going on behind the scenes. Job did not know that conversation took place until **after** everything was said and done—if he was the author of the book. Because of the conversation, here is what **we** know that Job didn’t.

A. God pointed Job out to Satan

Notice again verse 8—“And the Lord said unto Satan, ‘Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?’

--Was Job “perfect” in the sense that he never sinned? No; he was a sinner just like us but he feared God, and loved God, and obeyed God, and avoided evil. He was so blameless and upright, though, that God says “there is none like him in the earth” and points Job out to Satan.

I know I just started, but let’s **pause here** for a moment and consider this question: What does God know about us and our character? What would God say about us? God said of Job that he was good, upright, feared God, and avoided evil. Of Abraham, God said “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment” (Gen 18:19). What would God say about you? What would God say about me?

Not only did God point out Job to Satan,

B. God permitted Satan to take Job’s possessions—as well as his children

Notice verse 12 “And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, *all that he hath is in thy power*; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord.”

--What did Job have that Satan took away?

--Verse 2—Seven sons and three daughters

--Verse 3—7000 sheep, 3000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 mules, and a very great household

Two things struck me as I was thinking about this.

1. The evilness and hatred of Satan. Satan was given permission to touch **all** that Job had and that is what he took. There was no mercy or pity—Satan backed up the dump truck and piled on all the hurt that he possibly could!

2. Secondly, why did God agree to this? Why would God give His enemy permission to destroy nearly everything that His child owned? To show Satan that Satan was wrong—Job did not love and serve and obey God because of possessions.

Job passed part 1 of the challenge with flying colors. Notice verses 20-22 of Chapter 1. Unfortunately for Job—but fortunately for us—God and Satan had one more conversation.

C. God permitted Satan to take Job’s health

Notice Chapter 2, verse 3... “although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause.”

Why is God saying **He** is doing it when Satan is the one doing it? Because God is all-powerful—not Satan—and since God is sovereign and sets the limits on Satan’s attacks, God is in essence “doing this” to Job because He **allows** it. Although I said it last week, I’m going to say it again—“I am glad that God is all-powerful and good!” Oh, how it ought to make us shudder if Satan was all-powerful! Notice verses 4-7.

2. The Arguments of Job

In chapters 1 and 2 we noted Job’s character and the conversations that took place between God and Satan. In Chapters 38, 39, 40, and 41, God has a conversation with Job....although it is pretty much one-sided because **God talks** and Job listens! In Chapter 42, Job responds to what God said and repents and God restores Job’s health and possessions. Most of the book, however—specifically chapters 3-37—deal with conversations between Job and 4 individuals, 3 of whom are called his friends.

Job’s friends were not overly helpful, however—and Job told them as much—because they held firmly to one belief that Job disagreed with—**all suffering** is due to sin. Job did not believe that and made two arguments in his conversation with his friends.

A. That the wicked sometimes prosper

Job 12:6 “The tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure; into whose hand God bringeth abundantly.”

Job 21:7-10 “Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power? Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them. Their bull gendereth, and faileth not; their cow calveth, and casteth not her calf.”

Job 21:13 “They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave.”

B. That he was innocent

Job 6:30 “Is there iniquity in my tongue? cannot my taste discern perverse things?”

Job 16:16-17 “My face is foul with weeping, and on my eyelids is the shadow of death; Not for any injustice in mine hands: also my prayer is pure.”

Job 23:11-12 “My foot hath held His steps, His way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of His lips; I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.”

Job 27:6 “My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.”

Job 33:8-9 Elihu says to Job “Surely thou hast spoken in mine hearing, and I have heard the voice of thy words, saying, I am clean without transgression, I am innocent; neither is there iniquity in me.”

Thirdly, let's note **3. The Arrogance of Job**

God called Job a good and upright man, one that feared God and avoided evil, but he was not sinless. Because he was ignorant of the conversation between God and Satan—and in light of his blameless, upright character—he was puzzled as to why all this evil was coming his way. He was feeling mistreated by God and his arrogance is seen throughout his conversations with his friends—so much so that they stopped talking to him. **Job 32:1-2** “So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was *righteous in his own eyes*. Then was kindled the wrath of Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the kindred of Ram: against Job was his wrath kindled, because he *justified himself rather than God*.”

A. Job accused God of doing wrong

Job 9:17 “For He breaketh me with a tempest, and multiplieth my wounds *without cause*.”

Job 10:7 “Thou knowest that *I am not wicked*; and there is none that can deliver out of thine hand.”

Job 19:7-11 “Behold, I cry out of wrong, but I am not heard: I cry aloud, but there is no judgment. He hath *fenced up my way* that I cannot pass, and He hath *set darkness in my paths*. He *hath stripped me of my glory*, and *taken the crown from my head*. He hath *destroyed me on every side*, and I am gone: and *mine hope hath* He removed like a tree. He hath also *kindled His wrath against me*, and He *counteth me unto Him as one of His enemies*.”

‘You are not doing right in allowing this to happen to me, God!’

B. Job believed God owed him an explanation

Job 10:1-2 “My soul is weary of my life; I will leave my complaint upon myself; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. *I will say unto God, Do not condemn me; shew me wherefore thou contendest with me.*”

Job 13:23-24 “How many are mine iniquities and sins? make me to know my transgression and my sin. Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and holdest me for thine enemy?”

Job 33:12-13 Elihu says to Job “Behold, in this thou art not just: I will answer thee, that God is greater than man. Why dost thou strive against Him? *for He giveth not account of any of His matters.*”

God rebuked Job's three friends but did not rebuke Elihu because he was right—God does NOT owe us an explanation as to **why** He does what He does.

4. The Answer from God

In chapter 38, God breaks His silence and Job gets his wish—an opportunity to argue his case before God. As stated earlier, however, the conversation is rather one-sided—and God is the one doing the talking!

A. The rebuke by God

Job 38:1-3 “Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.”

“You wanted your day in court, Job. You wanted to meet me face to face and ‘straighten me out,’ so to speak. Here is your chance! You demanded things of me; now I am demanding things from you!”

Job 40:1-4 “Moreover the Lord answered Job, and said, Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him? he that reproveth God, let him answer it.” Then Job answered the Lord, and said, Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? *I will lay mine hand upon my mouth.*”

Alcorn points out that although God never **tells** Job to shut his mouth; Job realizes that he **must** in light of the majesty of God.

Job 40:6-8 “Then answered the Lord unto Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Gird up thy loins now like a man: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?”

Question: Why do we want to know why? Sometimes we want to know why so **we** can decide if that is a good reason or not! Do we **really think** we can say to God, ‘Okay, that’s a good reason,’ or ‘No, God—that’s a bad idea—you need to do something different?’

B. The refusal of God

Did God ever tell Job why he suffered? Maybe; maybe not. I say that only because we don’t know who wrote the book of Job. If God used Job to write the book then, yes—Job knew what was happening behind the scenes but well **after** the events took place. But God’s immediate answer did not give Job the **why**; instead it gave him the **Who**. God reveals to Job that God is God—and Job is not—by asking him one question after another and from those questions we have....

C. The revelation of God

Since we are nearly out of time, I want to look at two of my favorites:

Job 38:35 “Canst thou send lightnings, that they may go and say unto thee, Here we are?”

“Job, does lightning come up to you as your servant and ask where you want them to go?”

In Job 41 we have the description of a beast—many believe a crocodile—that is so fierce that people are afraid at just the sight of it. Notice what God asks Job:

Job 41:3-5 “Will he make many supplications unto thee? will he speak soft words unto thee? Will he make a covenant with thee? wilt thou take him for a servant for ever? Wilt thou play with him as with a bird?”

As we close, notice James 5:11 in your **bulletin**: “Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is **very pitiful**, and of tender mercy.”

Isn’t it interesting that although God did NOT give Job the reason, God was still very pitiful and of tender mercy. It should also be pointed out that Job was satisfied with WHO instead of WHY—and we should be too!

Here are some things I believe God would have us consider:

1. God pointed Job out to Satan. Although none of us want Satan to put a target on our back, God does have an opinion of us. Are there things you and God know that need to change? Are you confessing and forsaking those things—or are you making excuses?
2. Have you been focusing on the **why** instead of the **who**? Job was and not only did it lead to frustration—it was sin. What did Job do about his sin? Repented. Do you need to do the same?
3. Lastly, are you saved? Are you certain you will spend eternity in heaven? If not, why not get that settled today?

WHAT JOB TEACHES US ABOUT GOD—RANDY ALCORN

1. Insisting on knowing the unknowable dooms us to frustration and resentment
2. God never faults Job for being finite; only for failing to recognize that he has no right to pass judgment on the wisdom and goodness of an infinite Creator
3. God has revealed just enough of Himself to give us reasons for faith, but not enough to make faith unnecessary
4. When crisis comes, pour out our heart to God—He can handle it!
5. Trust that God is working behind the scenes and that our suffering has a hidden purpose
6. Our inability to understand all God's purposes in evil and suffering should not surprise us
7. What we call the problem of evil is often the problem of our finite and fallen understanding
8. God's explanations probably wouldn't be as helpful or comforting as we imagine
9. We should not turn from God and internalize our anger, allowing it to become bitterness
10. If God offered constant explanations, our lives would not be free or normal, and would not allow for faith or trust
11. We should Biblically evaluate the counsel of friends, authors, teachers, and counselors