

JOB SURVIVED



Scripture:

Psalm 26

¹Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering. ²Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and mind. ³For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in faithfulness to you.

⁴I do not sit with the worthless, nor do I consort with hypocrites; ⁵I hate the company of evildoers, and will not sit with the wicked.

⁶I wash my hands in innocence, and go around your altar, O LORD, ⁷singing aloud a song of thanksgiving, and telling all your wondrous deeds.

⁸O LORD, I love the house in which you dwell, and the place where your glory abides. ⁹Do not sweep me away with sinners, nor my life with the bloodthirsty, ¹⁰those in whose hands are evil devices, and whose right hands are full of bribes.

¹¹But as for me, I walk in my integrity; redeem me, and be gracious to me. ¹²My foot stands on level ground; in the great congregation I will bless the LORD.

Job 1:1, 2:1-10

¹There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.

¹One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD. ²The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." ³The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason." ⁴Then Satan answered the LORD, "Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives. ⁵But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." ⁶The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, he is in your power; only spare his life."

⁷So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD, and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. ⁸Job took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and sat among the ashes.

⁹Then his wife said to him, "Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die." ¹⁰But he said to her, "You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



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The book of Job follows the book of Esther in the bible. The author of Job is dealing with the universal question: why do good people suffer? And when we suffer, how does the suffering affect our faith in God?

We still ask these questions today. Does God have a purpose in allowing suffering? When the firestorms came and kept burning a year ago in our region, I asked this question. What good can come out of the fires? How does the death of all those who didn't escape make any sense? Innocent loss of life is heartbreaking.

It is worthwhile to ponder what you believe..... Is it that God allows suffering because it empowers us to help each other? Because it bonds us closer together and makes us stronger in the end? I personally know people who can't reconcile the suffering of little children with faith in God.

We all suffer at some time in our lives. Being prepared is always good. But Job could not have been prepared for what he was about to suffer. There were no natural consequences to explain what he went through. None of his friends could figure it out either. His suffering seemed ineffable.

The lectionary passage today skips a lot of the story of Job. It helps to hear a summary of the story to understand how to apply the lessons in Job to our lives today.

No human is purely good without fault. But Job comes pretty close. Yet, in the course of one day, Job receives three messages, each bearing separate news that his livestock, servants, and ten children have all died. Job tears his clothes and shaves his head in mourning, but he still blesses God in his prayers. The passage today covers a dialogue

Between Satan and God who grants him permission to "test" Job.

Then Job is afflicted with horrible skin sores. His wife encourages him to curse God and to give up and die, but Job refuses and struggles to faithfully accept his suffering.

Three of Job's friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, come to visit him, sitting with Job in

silence for seven days out of respect for his mourning due to all his losses.

On the seventh day his friends share their thoughts on Job's afflictions in long, poetic statements. Job responds by cursing the day he was born, comparing life and death to light and darkness.

But Eliphaz believes that Job's agony must be due to some sin Job has committed, and he urges Job to seek God's favor. Bildad and Zophar agree that Job must have committed evil and argue that he should strive to exhibit more blameless behavior. Bildad surmises that Job's children brought their deaths upon themselves. Even worse, Zophar implies that whatever wrong Job has done he probably deserves greater punishment than what he has received! What a great friend Zophar was! NOT!

Job responds to each of these remarks, growing so irritated that he calls his friends "worthless physicians."

After defending his blameless character, Job ponders the human condition and our relationship to God. He wonders why God judges people by their actions if God can just as easily alter or forgive their behavior. Job wonders how a human can appease or court God's justice.

He concludes that God's ways are beyond human understanding and admits that he does not even understand himself well enough to effectively plead his case to God.

Job's friends are offended that he scorns their wisdom. They think he lacks an appropriate fear of God, and they stress their ongoing point that nothing good comes of wickedness. Job keeps his faith in God and in himself in spite of his so-called friends and he proclaims that there is a "Redeemer" in heaven who will vouch for him.

God finally speaks, calling from a whirlwind and demanding Job to be brave and respond to his questions.

God's questions are rhetorical, intending to show how little Job knows about creation and how much power God alone has. Overwhelmed by the encounter, Job acknowledges God's

unlimited power and admits the limitations of his human mind. This response pleases God, but he is upset with Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar for spouting poor advice. Job intercedes on their behalf, and God forgives them. God returns Job's health, provides him with twice as much property, new children, and an extremely long life but the same wife. It would be fun to write a fantasy book about Job's persistent wife. She suffered the same losses as Job but she is ignored.

The dominant theme of Job is the difficulty of understanding why an all-powerful God allows good people to suffer.

Job seeks a way to justify God's actions not just for himself, but he cannot understand why there are evil people who "harm women, / and do no good to the widow," only to be rewarded with long, successful lives (24:21). Job is especially troubled by the plight of women who are taken advantage of and mistreated with no punishment for the perpetrator.

At the end of the book, God declines to present a detailed explanation for the unfair distribution of blessings. So Job concludes that God's power is so great that humans cannot possibly justify God's ways.

One point that is clear from the book of Job is that Job survived through all the suffering. He held on to a thin thread of faith in God at times, but he held on. It is also clear that God can take our anger and allows us to vent our frustrations, since Job was allowed to do so.

Two of my favorite passages in the book of Job inspire faith.

- "You will be secure, because there is hope; you will look about you and take your rest in safety. You will lie down, with no one to make you afraid." Job 11:18-19
- "The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life." Job 33:4

Job's faith didn't set him free from the suffering, but it made him resilient enough to endure it.

James 1:2-3 says: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know the testing of

your faith produces perseverance." Romans 5:3 also says that suffering produces endurance. And later in Romans 12 Paul says we should be: joyful in hope and patient in our afflictions while being faithful in prayer.

So the message from Job seems to be saying, have faith no matter how bad this life may seem. Your faith will build resilience and help you through the suffering.

I have seen that happen over and over again. Watching others have deep faith while suffering has inspired my own faith.

Faith is the topic in a new TV series called "Manifest." Anyone seen it? It now seems to have an underlying religious theme that keeps reflecting on the verse: "All things work for good for those who love God."

The story is about an airplane that goes missing for 5 years and suddenly lands as if nothing has happened. The people on board haven't changed but the world they return to has aged 5 years.

At first it seemed the title Manifest referred to the airplane's manifest. A flight manifest is a list of passengers and crew of an aircraft compiled before departure based on flight check-in information.

Now as the story has progressed, the returning passengers are doing amazing things like rescuing kids who were kidnapped and curing cancer; it seems the word "manifest" might refer to a manifestation of God. It's an interesting new show.

What does this have to do with Job? The pillow on Manifest says: "All things work together for good for those who love God." It was embroidered by one of the passenger's mother who died within the 5 years she was on the airplane. Periodically, she hears her mother's voice quoting that verse from the Bible, especially at times when she wants to give up due to all the ways she is psychologically suffering over the changes that happened in the 5 years she was gone. Her fiancé married someone else, her mother died, her ability to do her job as a police detective is questionable, etc. When she looks at the pillow's verse, she gets inspired to endure.

So what verse do you cling to when you are suffering? How do you hold onto a thread of faith in God in the midst of the chaos in our nation?

I try to remember that God has a larger view than I do. God can see the whole universe at once and we are just on a tiny blue ball in the vast expanse of space.

Yet, I believe God can see each of us now, too. And knows what purpose there is in suffering.

We are to trust that God is good in the midst of suffering. And that God is great. Greater than the frustrations we go through and the mistakes we make. God's love is a greater power for healing and wholeness than anything man can create. And God is eternal and present in and around us always so we have nothing to fear now or in the future.

A year and a few days ago I was praying fervently for the fires to stop. They didn't stop as fast as I was hoping, and some people died. I didn't get my prayer answered as completely as I wanted. But like Job, all of us here have survived great and small losses. And some here who have been through the worst of the fires have even thanked God for the fires and feel set free from the material trappings. Others have said they feel closer to friends and family. And yet there are others who just picked themselves up and took off, never looking back because they felt so traumatized.

For us who are still here. God gave us a job. To be strong like Job. To help heal those who are still suffering, and to build up the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. That means to build up: peace, hope, love, and joy so others can enjoy an abundant life of faith. To love like God loves: unconditionally. And to share our resources which includes sharing our resilience building faith. And to do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Benediction:

And may the grace of our Lord JESUS Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forevermore. Amen


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