Good morning, Moon Valley!

Today we conclude our sermon series titled, ▶ “Suffering Embraced.” It is designed to help us think through and live through suffering.

No series on suffering would be complete without considering the Bible book of ▶ Job. The entire book is dedicated to the issue of unexplained suffering and injustice and evil. Forty-two chapters. Over a thousand verses.

But it’s not an easy read.

My message has two parts. The ▶ first part is entirely from the perspective of Job himself. I’ll be speaking as if I were Job. What he has to say is largely from the biblical text in Job. I’ve taken some liberties, but not many. The purpose of the first part is to invite you to enter into the suffering and injustice of Job. To identify with it. To sense it. To resonate with it. To feel as desperate as Job was. Desperate for God. Desperate for some answers.

In the ▶ second part of my message, we’ll be looking at what the Lord has to say to Job and others. We’ll try to make some sense of suffering based on what God says. We’ll try to put some pieces together in a way that’s helpful for you as you face suffering, particularly suffering that is unexplained.

So, here’s the ▶ first part. Here’s Job. Bob will be back in few minutes.

My name is Job, and I am not the man I once was, nor will I ever be. I once delighted in God. I once enjoyed the life he gave me. Now, I am crushed by his neglect, or worse yet, by his intent. And I just don’t get it.

I have never pretended to be without sin, but I have feared God and turned away from evil as much or more than any man. I have gratefully acknowledged the gifts God has given me, and I have done my best to steward them well.

God gave me a wonderful wife to whom I have been faithful these many years. I have not been a perfect husband, but neither have I strayed, not even secretly in my heart.

God gave me ten beautiful children: seven sons and three daughters, all grown, all close knit. On their birthdays, we would all get together at one another's houses to celebrate. We would eat and drink and laugh and reminisce and laugh some more. So much joy. So much love.

And I was so concerned for their spiritual well-being that, after each celebration, I would rise early and offer burnt offerings to God for each one, just in case they had somehow sinned.

God also gave me great wealth, far more than I deserved. I had 7,000 sheep for my wool business. I had 3,000 camels for my transportation business. I had 500 pairs of oxen for my farming business. I had 500 female donkeys for my milk business. And I had a large staff of employees to take care of it all. I had great wealth, but I did not put my confidence in it. My confidence was in God, and I felt a responsibility to be generous, not only to my staff, but also to the poor and to the fatherless.

And I was well respected in my community. I had accumulated great wealth, but had not succumbed to the greed and selfishness that wealth can bring. On the contrary, I was a public servant. I sat at the city gate as a local judge. "Men listened to me and waited and kept silence for my counsel."

I say all this not out of arrogance, but bewilderment. The circumstances that have befallen me are inexplicable and, I dare say, undeserved. Consider my losses and judge for yourself.

I remember the day my life was eclipsed and darkness descended. The first messenger arrived with the news that all my oxen and all my donkeys had been stolen by a marauding band of Sabeans. And worse, those of my staff who had been tending the livestock had been murdered.

While the first messenger was yet speaking, a second arrived with more bad news. Lightning had struck and killed all my sheep along with all those of my staff who had been tending them.

While the second messenger was yet speaking, a third arrived with more bad news. All my camels had been stolen by a band of Chaldeans. And worse, those of my staff who had been tending them had been murdered.

In the blink of an eye, all my businesses were gone. All my assets, gone. All my employees, gone. And I remember thinking, as horrible as this is, at least I have my children. At least my family is intact, and that's the most important thing to me.

But while the third messenger was yet speaking, a fourth arrived with the worst news. All ten of my children had been killed. Every one of them, dead. They had been together at the home of my firstborn son when a tornado blew the house down upon them. They had all been crushed to death.

The pain of that day was unspeakable. I imagined the suffering of my children being crushed under the weight of falling debris. I imagined their pain, their cries for help, their wounds, their panic. I imagined it all because they couldn't tell me. I ran to my son's home where I found them. Silent. Disfigured. Lifeless. After unsuccessfully trying to rouse each one

back to life, I tore my robe, shaved my head, and fell to the ground in anguish.

It's hard to describe the surreal experience of burying ten children and hundreds of employees at the same time. For the first time in some forty years, my wife and I were childless and empty-handed.

Shortly after, having barely finished burying my dead, I woke up one morning feeling feverish. I thought it was probably the stress of it all, but then I felt the first lump. It was on my right side. Within hours, sores broke out all over my body. I had inflamed, ulcerous boils from the top of my head to the soles of my feet. There was horrible, unrelenting itching from blackened, peeling, oozing boils, many of which had worms in them. I had difficulty breathing. I had dark circles under my eyes and the foulest breath. I lost my appetite. I had chronic diarrhea. I lost weight. I lost strength. I was in continual pain. I was restless. I struggled with anxiety and depression. And all this lasted for months on end.

I was so desperate I would go to the city dump where trash and dung is burned, and I would sit in the ashes and spread them on my body and scrape myself with broken pottery for some temporary relief from the pain. What had I done to deserve this?

I had lost every person in my household. Everyone, except my wife, who had been by my side these many years. But she was so overcome by the pain of our loss and the sight of my suffering that she couldn't take it anymore. She had a breakdown. It was more than she could bear. She stepped away from me and said, "Curse God and die." Her breakdown added to my misery. Where is God?

And then three of my friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, came from out of town to "comfort" me. When they saw me, they didn't even recognize me. When they realized it was me, they were so horrified that they wailed

and wept, they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads, and they remained speechless for seven days and seven nights in my presence. Which was ironically appropriate. Seven days and seven nights is the customary period of time for mourning the dead.

I wished I were dead. In fact, I cursed the day of my birth. “Let the day perish on which I was born,” I said. “Why did I not die at birth . . . then I would have been at rest . . . I have no rest!” I said. And I said some other things along those lines because I just didn’t get it. I didn’t get why all this was happening to me.

Then my friends opened up. They opened up on me, saying I must have done something really awful to deserve all this. It started slow and then escalated into three rounds of heated arguments.

Eliphaz, the oldest and kindest friend, started it off by saying, “If one ventures a word with you, will you be impatient?” He was just getting warmed up. Then he suggested that I must be reaping what I had sown. He said, “As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same.” That’s a nice way of saying I had it coming.

When it was Bildad’s turn, he went further. He suggested that my children who had been crushed to death must have had it coming. He said, “If your children have sinned against him, he has delivered them into the hand of their transgression.”

And my third friend, Zophar, piled on after that. He floated the idea that I was probably experiencing less punishment than I actually deserved. He said, “. . . Know then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves.”

And on it went, round and round, all of my friends insisting that, because I was suffering terribly, I must have been sinning terribly. While there is truth to the notion that one generally reaps what one sows, I kept arguing

that I had done nothing to deserve this, and I questioned the goodness and justice of God to allow it. I cried out to God in my suffering, but I found him to be uncommunicative, unjust, and unconcerned, and I declared my findings loudly.

My stark candor did not sit well with my friends. They called me a "maggot" and a "worm" and said, "there is no end to [my] iniquities."

Along the way, I said, "miserable comforters are you all." And I wondered why, at every turn, God was making me suffer, even at the hands of friends who are supposed to be my comforters. I just didn't get it.

After my three friends finally shut up, a fourth, younger man named Elihu spoke up. It was not exactly in my defense. He was angry with all of us. Angry at my friends because they had found me guilty without cause. Angry at me because I had tried to justify myself. He droned on and on.

I had complained that God was uncommunicative; but Elihu replied, "God speaks in one way, and in two, though man does not perceive it."

I had complained that God was unjust; but Elihu replied, "far be it from God that he should do wickedness."

I had complained that God is unconcerned. But Elihu replied, "He does not withdraw his eyes from the righteous."

But despite all the high-sounding God talk, my suffering remained undeserved and unexplained. I still didn't get it.

In my suffering, I wavered wildly; hopeful one moment, hopeless the next. In one moment, I said, "I know my Redeemer lives . . . I shall see God." In the next, I said to God, "you destroy the hope of man."

In one moment, I praised God saying, “You have granted me life and steadfast love, and your care has preserved my spirit.” In the next, I said to him, “Your hands fashioned and made me, and now you have destroyed me altogether.”

I don’t get it. How can God be both good and sovereign in light of my suffering? How can God be just when the evil prosper and the righteous suffer? I don’t get it. “The words of Job are ended.”

Okay, that was Part One. From the perspective of Job, I have just summarized the first 37 chapters of the book that bears his name. And now you want some answers, right? You want to get to ▶ Part Two, where we consider the words from the Lord on suffering.

Gird your loins. You may not like this.

The Lord’s response to Job is surprising and unsettling for what he does not do.

First, the Lord provides Job no explanation. No explanation for his suffering and no answers to his questions. None. As readers of the story, ***we*** get a glimpse of what’s going on. In Chapters 1 and 2, we’re told that Satan is involved. But Job doesn’t know that. And the Lord never tells him.

Second, the Lord offers no apology. No sorry for your suffering. No sorry for being silent for so long. Nothing like that.

Third, the Lord offers no sympathy. In fact, the Lord doesn’t even acknowledge that Job has suffered.

Fourth, the Lord offers no encouragement, at least not the kind of encouragement we might expect. No pep talk. No hang-in-there speech. No promise of better days ahead. None of that.

When the Lord finally does speak to Job, he opens up a can of questions and pours them all over Job as a form of reproof. I counted them, the Lord asks 60 questions in all. Sixty! They begin in chapter 38, verse 4.

▶ ESV Job 38:4 “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding.”

▶ ESV Job 38:5 “Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it?”

▶ ESV Job 38:6 “On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, 7 when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?”

▶ ESV Job 38:8 “Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb, 9 when I made clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band,”

▶ ESV Job 38:10 “and prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors, 11 and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed’?”

▶ ESV Job 38:12 “Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place, 13 that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth, and the wicked be shaken out of it?”

And so goes the questioning from the Lord. On and on. After about 42 questions, Job tries to interrupt by saying, in chapter 40, verse 4:

▶ ESV Job 40:4 “. . . what shall I answer you?”

But the Lord doesn’t stop; he keeps right on questioning, until Job finally says in ▶ chapter 42, verse 6:

ESV Job 42:6 “. . . I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”

Apparently, Job’s repentance was what God was waiting for because then God stops the questions. But now, we’re left with a question of our own: Why does Job need to repent? What did he do wrong? Isn’t Job the victim in all this?

What makes this even harder to fathom is the fact that Job is one of the greatest God followers in history. This is not my opinion; it’s God’s. In chapter 1, before any of Job’s troubles began, we’re told that the angels were presenting themselves before God, when God says to Satan in ▶ verse 8:

ESV Job 1:8 . . . “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?”

In God’s opinion, there is none like Job on the earth. Job is the greatest human being on the planet. God is bragging about Job to Satan like a proud father. That’s when Satan basically says to God, “The only reason Job follows you is because you’re the sugar daddy who has spoiled him with so many children and riches. Take away all the perks, and Job will curse you to your face.”

So, God turns over to Satan all that Job has—his children and his riches—not because Job’s been bad. But because he’s been good. This is not a punishment; it’s a test.

And Job seems to pass the test. Despite all his troubles, Job never curses God. And his theology remains rock solid, at least in the beginning. Upon losing his children and his riches, Job says, as recorded in ▶ chapter 1, verse 21:

> ESV Job 1:21 . . . "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."

The very next verse, ▶ verse 22 says,

> ESV Job 1:22 In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.

Does this sound like somebody who needs to repent?

When Job's wife breaks down and encourages Job to "curse God and die," Jobs says in ▶ chapter 2, verse 10:

> ESV Job 2:10 . . . "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" . . .

Verse ▶ 10 reiterates,

> ESV Job 2:10 . . . In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Does this sound like a man who needs to repent? No, it doesn't. At least, not yet.

It's when the suffering is unrelenting and undeserved and unexplained that Job begins to develop a certain attitude. It's when moments turn to days, and days turn to weeks, and weeks turn to months and months of suffering. That's when an attitude takes root. It's an attitude that I've had

in the midst of my own suffering. It's an attitude that tempts me still today. I'll bet you've had it, too.

It's an attitude of entitlement.

And this attitude of entitlement can be very, very sneaky. Let me explain.

In various ways, Job says that he doesn't deserve the suffering he's experiencing. Twice in ▶ chapter 9, in verses 15 and 20, Job says, "I am in the right." Which is his way of saying, "I haven't done anything to deserve this."

Twice more in ▶ chapter 9, in verses 20 and 21, Job says, "I am blameless." Again, this is his way of saying, "I don't deserve this."

In this, Job is absolutely right, and God agrees with him. In ▶ chapter 2, verse 3, God says to Satan about Job:

> ESV Job 2:3 ". . . you incited me against him to destroy him without reason."

"Without reason" means Job doesn't deserve it.

Also, in ▶ chapter 42, verse 7, when God calls Job's friends on the carpet for incorrectly accusing Job of wrongdoing, he says:

> ESV Job 42:7 ". . . you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has."

So, on the matter of whether or not Job deserves his suffering, God says Job's friends are wrong and Job is right. Quite often, suffering is not a consequence of our own sinfulness. And when that's the case, it's no sin to believe and to say that your suffering is undeserved.

But somewhere along the line, Job's thinking begins to migrate to new and faulty territory. Job reasons wrongly that, if he himself has done no wrong, then God must have done him wrong to allow such suffering. Isn't that the faulty thinking we are tempted to embrace in the midst of our unexplained suffering? "If I've done no wrong, then God must have done me wrong to allow such suffering. And if God has done me wrong, how can I trust Him?"

Job resorts to such faulty logic because he can't imagine how his undeserved suffering could serve any good purpose. He's tried so hard to be good that he can't imagine why God would allow things to go so bad for him. Shouldn't following God lead to blessings? This is where an attitude of entitlement creeps in. "I don't deserve this," migrates to "I deserve better," which sounds so similar, but is really miles apart.

Entitlement is so sneaky. "I don't deserve this," is saying, "I've done no wrong," which is true for Job. But "I deserve better" is saying, "God has done me wrong," which is patently false and alienating. That's entitlement. And it puts up a relational barrier to God because it views God as unreliable.

So, God seeks to break the barrier by breaking the attitude. That's why God opens up the can of questions all over Job: to break the attitude, so the relationship can be restored. That's the most loving and merciful thing the Lord can do for a guy with an attitude. In two of the Lord's sixty questions, he puts his finger on Job's problematic attitude of entitlement. In ▶ chapter 40, verse 8, the Lord says to Job:

> ESV Job 40:8 "Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be in the right?"

Just because Job has done no wrong to deserve his suffering, it does not follow that God has done Job wrong to allow it. God allows undeserved suffering to accomplish his good purposes. Exactly how this works is beyond our understanding, right there with exactly why he created the hippopotamus. And God owes us no explanations. That's why God asks sixty questions that Job cannot answer. Through the questions, God is not seeking information; he's providing perspective and inviting repentance. In essence, the Lord is saying, "Can you create or control or even explain anything in the universe that I have created? You can't, can you? Well, if you can't create or control or even explain anything I've created, then aren't you way out of your league to conclude that I must be unfair or uninvolved or unloving to allow your unexplained suffering?"

Finally, the light goes on for Job. In conjunction with his repentance, he says in ▶ chapter 42, verse 3:

> ESV Job 42:3 ". . . I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. . . ."

In chapter ▶ 40, verse 4, Job admits,

> ESV Job 40:4 ". . . I am of small account . . ."

Which means, "I am such a lightweight. I am way out of my league. I have no idea what I'm talking about. I haven't got a clue." Job's repentance is fueled by a healthy helping of humble pie. Entitlement gives way to humility.

And entitlement not only gives way to humility, but it also gives way to trust in the sovereignty of God. In his brokenness and repentance, Job confesses to God, as recorded in ▶ chapter 42, verse 2:

ESV Job 42:2 “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.”

In the same breath, Job says in ▶ verse 6,

ESV Job 42:6 “. . . I despise myself, and repent . . .”

That’s Job saying, “I hate that I didn’t trust you, Lord. I despise my attitude of entitlement. I’m sorry. You’re in charge. Your way is best. I trust you. I’m still your man if you’ll have me.”

Bear in mind that, when Job says this, he is still covered with boils. He is still childless. He is still penniless. This is important because, in that moment, Satan is defeated. Remember, Satan was hoping that losing everything would cause Job to give up on God. So, Job is instrumental in a victory over Satan that he doesn’t even know about.

There’s a host of things Job doesn’t know in that moment. He doesn’t know the blessings God has in store for him in the future. He doesn’t know that his life story is going to end up in the Bible. He doesn’t know that countless people will draw strength from his story. He doesn’t know that thousands of years later, we’ll still be talking about him, relating to him, admiring his endurance and faith. He doesn’t know.

But God does. And God has got Job right where he wants him.

What does God do when Job repents? Chances are you know the more famous outcomes. God gives Job all his stuff back. God gives Job ten more children to replace to ten that he lost. God restores Job’s health. And God gives Job twice as many assets as he had before.

Not bad.

But that's not my favorite part. My favorite part is the first thing that the Lord says after Job's repentance. It's recorded for us in ▶ chapter 42, verse 7. The Lord turns to Eliphaz, Job's oldest friend and says in Job's hearing:

> ESV Job 42:7 . . . "My anger burns against you [Eliphaz] and against your two friends [Bildad and Zophar], for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has."

Think of what Job must have felt like hearing those words. How would you feel if, in your presence, God called on the carpet the people who wrongly accused and betrayed you? Vindicated. Affirmed. Relieved.

That's so good, but it's still not my favorite part. My favorite part is how the Lord describes Job. Two words: ▶ "my servant." How honoring! How empowering! Job must have thought, "I'm still his! I'm his man. He still wants to use me. He's still got me in palm of his hand. He's still got me on his team, on his side, on his heart."

"My servant" is the same description of Job God gave to Satan back in ▶ chapter 1, verse 8:

> ESV Job 1:8 . . . "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth . . ."

So, in spite of his losses, in spite of his suffering, in spite of the accusations against him, in spite of his lapse in attitude, Job's status has not changed in God's eyes. He's still, "my servant."

How do you apply this? I'd like to build a simple statement that distills the message of Job—one memorable saying that you can keep in mind and tell yourself when you are in the midst of unexplained suffering—one Big

Idea that you can store and retrieve as needed. Here ▶ it is: "Lord, I don't get it, but you do, and you've got me."

Surely some of you are facing unexplained suffering right now as followers of Jesus Christ.

Maybe it's physical. Perhaps you're faced with a chronic illness or disability. And you're grieving the loss of the life you once had.

Maybe it's financial. Perhaps you're on the brink of losing it all. Or perhaps you're still supporting your adult children, and now also your aging parents, and you don't see how there's going to be anything left for your own future. And you worry.

Maybe it's relational. Perhaps you're grieving the loss of someone dear to you and your life will never be the same. Or perhaps your family is painfully dysfunctional and requires constant vigilance to negotiate it, and you're weary of it.

Maybe it's occupational. Perhaps you've given everything you've got to make a go of your business or your ministry. You've tried to do it in a conscientious, godly way. But the fruit of your efforts is just not evident. And the hardships just keep coming. And you don't know why.

Maybe it's emotional. Perhaps depression has darkened your door. Or persistent anxiety. Or loneliness. Or fear. And you haven't been able explain it or shake it.

Remember Job, the godliest man on earth, was tempted by the same attitude of entitlement that tempts us in our suffering: "I deserve better! God has done me wrong!"

Resist the temptation.

Like Job, you may be instrumental in a victory over Satan that you know nothing about. And there's a host of other angles God may be working right this moment that you know nothing about.

And you are still his servant.

So, tell yourself the truth, and tell it to God: "Lord, I don't get it, but you do, and you've got me."

I invite you to close your eyes for a closing prayer. Make this prayer your own: "Lord, there is so much suffering in this world and my life that I don't get. It's beyond me, and it bothers me. Please forgive my attitude of entitlement. Help me, instead, to keep trusting you and thanking you. Lord, I don't get it, but you do, and you've got me. Thank you. Amen."