

Sunday, October 3, 2021

“Troubles, Troubles” – Bible Study & Reflection on Job 1:1, 2:1-10

Dear Members & Friends:

I invited you to read the following passage from Job 1:1, 2:1-10 (*International Children’s Bible*).

A man named Job lived in the land of Uz. He was an honest man and innocent of any wrong. He honored God and stayed away from evil.

One day the angels came to show themselves before the Lord. And Satan also came with them. ² The Lord said to Satan, “Where have you come from?”

Satan answered the Lord, “I have been wandering around the earth. I have been going back and forth in it.”

³ Then the Lord said to Satan, “Have you noticed my servant Job? No one else on earth is like him. He is an honest man, innocent of any wrong. He honors God and stays away from evil. You caused me to ruin him for no good reason. But he continues to be without blame.”

⁴ “One skin for another!” Satan answered. “A man will give all he has to save his own life. ⁵ But reach out your hand and destroy his own flesh and bones. Then he will curse you to your face.”

⁶ The Lord said to Satan, “All right, then. Job is in your power. But you must let him live.”

⁷ So Satan left the Lord’s presence. And he put painful sores all over Job’s body. They went from the top of his head to the soles of his feet. ⁸ Then Job took a piece of broken pottery. And he used it to scrape himself. He sat in ashes to show how upset he was.

⁹ Job’s wife said to him, “Are you still trying to stay innocent? You should just curse God and die!”

¹⁰ Job answered, “You are talking like a foolish woman. Should we take only good things from God and not trouble?” In all this Job did not sin in what he said.

So what’s the Book of Job all about? Is it an allegory explaining why bad things happen to good people? Is it a story to encourage us to hold on to the virtue of patience in the midst of life challenges and troubles?

I like what Cheryl Lindsay suggests about the story of Job. Job’s story is not an explanation of why bad things happen to people but how to keep going when bad things happen. And surely, there’s a lot more going on in Job’s character than just the virtue of being patient. States Lindsay:

“After reading through the entire book of Job from the vantage point of searching for answers and meaning, I became convinced that most people who refer to the patience of Job haven’t read the entire book. In it, Job goes through all the stages of grief. He argues with God and his friends. He laments and bemoans his faith. He displays impatience, frustration, confusion, and at times despondency. Yes, at times, his walk reflects a level of patience that works noting, most remarkably in the passage we focus on this week. I would submit, however, that this is the beginning of the story and cannot be used to summarize his journey. In addition, there’s much more at work in the interaction recorded here.”

Then Lindsay goes on to explore the two questions that Job’s unnamed wife asks: “You are still as faithful as ever, aren’t you? Why don’t you curse God and die?” Lindsay says that the questions that Job’s wife raises helps Job come to terms with living through his suffering with integrity. After all, the Book of Job never says that his wife died. So everything that happened to Job happened to his wife as well. I find Lindsay’s interpretation thought-provoking.

Integrity. Now there’s a word that’s hard to live out when faced with life’s adversities. Two Hebrew terms help define Job’s integrity – *tam* and *yashar*. *Tam* means whole or complete rather than without sin. *Yashar* translated as “upright” in Hebrew also has the sense of straightforwardness or directness. With Job, what you see is what you get. Lindsay observes:

“Integrity may be defined as keeping your word or following through on your promises. It denotes steadfast adherence to your beliefs, values, and principles. Integrity also means holding true to your nature. In the exchange of the heavenly council that opens this passage, Job is commended as the model human being who ‘still persists in his integrity.’ That does not mean that Job was perfect, or that the Holy One expected him to be”

Or as Alissa Jones Nelson succinctly puts it: “Job’s blamelessness is integrity, not sinlessness.”

So does Job teach us about patience, integrity, coping with adversity? Why does the Book of Job appear in the Bible?

I have always loved what Rabbi Harold Kushner said about why Job was written in his classic book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. Kushner writes:

“About twenty-five hundred years ago, a man lived whose name we will never know, but who has enriched the minds and lives of human beings ever since. He was a sensitive man who saw good people getting sick and dying around him while proud and selfish people prospered. He heard all the learned, clever, and pious attempts to explain life, and he was as dissatisfied with them as we are today. Because he was a person of rare literary and intellectual gifts, he wrote a long philosophical poem on the subject of why God lets bad things happen to good people. This poem appears in the Bible as the Book of Job.”

This Sunday, is World Communion Sunday and Intergenerational Sunday. So we are drawn to think of our connectedness with others. We thing we know that is true of human existence is that everyone experiences suffering or troubles at one time or another in life. Certainly, we have faced the trial of the pandemic for the last year-and-a-half.

How do we talk to children and youth about adversity, troubles? Perhaps we simply say that it's really hard to be happy when bad things happen. Sometimes we may think troubles will never end. Maybe as we struggle through our difficulties, we learn patience and that makes us stronger than we thought we could ever be. Maybe it's okay to tell God that we don't like or understand what's happening to us. We can pray and ask God to be with us when bad things happen. We can learn that it is possible to have a good life, even though difficult things happen. We can have patience, look forward to better times, and be happy that we have loved ones, parents, grandparents, neighbors and friends who are there for us in bad times and good times.

Blessings on the Journey of Life,

Pastor Greg Rupright