

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

So far this year, we have been meditating on accounts more or less in chronological order.

Today, we are going to take a giant step back from about the 800s BC to about the 2,000s BC, to probably around the time of Abraham, to the land of Uz, where Job lived.

And I think it is important to point that timeframe out because what we're going to hear from Job is a Christian faith that you and I (4,000 years later) still hold to... still rejoice in...especially at Easter.

...as follows in Jesus' name:

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and satan also came among them. The LORD said to satan, "From where have you come?" satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." And the LORD said to satan, "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?" Then satan answered the LORD and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse You to your face." And the LORD said to satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand." So satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, and there came a messenger to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, and the Sabeans fell upon them and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you." While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "The Chaldeans formed three groups and made a raid on the camels and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, and behold, a great wind came across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they are dead, and I alone have escaped to tell you."

Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. And he said, "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." In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong. ^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

People loved by God,

Did you hear how the Lord described Job?

There is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil. ...

That sounds like someone the Lord is pleased with... and yet, the Lord offered him up to satan...

... Let that thought sink in... satan didn't ask for Job originally... the Lord volunteered him....

"Have you considered My servant Job...?"

...

Now this is a baffling thing to us.

We know God is all powerful, and just heard how satan had to request that God remove the hedge of protection around Job... so we know that nothing happens without God's permission.

We know He is good and gracious and merciful...

and we might be able to justify the idea of this good God protecting from and limiting the evil, but how do you justify in your head the idea of a good God actually sending the affliction?

...

First of all, you don't justify God. The lump of clay doesn't justify the potter that makes & shapes him. It is the other way around: God justifies you.

Even more precisely, God has justified you already through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

And that's really the underlying premise that we need to start with in any discussion about thanksgiving and suffering.

by nature.

But we like to start with the false premise that we are naturally good and can do good things for God

Even if we recognize and confess our complete corruption in sin as we do each week, the sinful nature in each of us fights for this feeling of self-worthiness and autonomy.

We desperately want to believe that we can earn God's pleasure and payback our misdeeds, as if we could mold ourselves into something good and beautiful for God to at least hold on to.

...

Now it's true, as a human being, originally created in God's image, you have an inherent worth ... but it isn't based on you and what you do or how you feel.

It's for reasons completely outside of you... on Jesus Christ.

It's based upon God's love for you, His creature... a creature so precious to Him

that He joined Himself to you by taking on your creatureliness when the Son of God became man.

He joined Himself to the rotting/decaying lump of clay that is humanity, that He might purify it.

All the rot, the death, all the filth of our corruption, Jesus took into Himself

when He was forsaken by God, mocked and tortured by men, and died on the cross...

when He **was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.** Romans 4:25

So Jesus' resurrection from the dead on the 3rd day is the proof that the Father has justified you, that is, has declared you righteous... innocent... free from all guilt and shame.

So, as was said before, you do not justify God, but He has justified you.

And that right there is all that you need to be truly thankful to God,

because His justification of you means that you can live before Him now with a clean conscience, and will live with Him in paradise forever,

rather than burn in unquenchable flame and fire under God's wrath for all eternity.

...

Now the question: Can this truly be all you need to be genuinely thankful?

Consider God's servant Job, there was none like him on all the earth.

He had it all. Ten adult children... that even got along with each other...

wealth and economic security ... and health that would lead him to a ripe old age.

He enjoyed a good reputation among the people as a respected elder, sought out for godly counsel.

... As satan had said, God **had put a hedge around him**, keeping him out of satan's reach.

God's protection and Job's prosperity was what satan credited Job's faith to in the first round,

as if Job's faith in God was only because it benefited Job in this life... a mercenary spirit.

But as we heard, after the Lord brought in the hedge so that it only covered his person, and after satan took all his children, all his servants (except the 4 messengers), and all his wealth, (but strategically kept his wife), what do you hear from Job?

"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return.

The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed [thanked] be the name of the LORD."

You hear a man with nothing, going from riches to rags in a single day, bless the name of the Lord.

And what is God's verdict: **In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.**

So it wasn't the people or the stuff in his life that gave or strengthened Job's faith in the Lord.

It must have been something else.

In Round 2 of satan's attacks, the Lord allowed him to ruin Job's health.

"Skin for skin!", satan says, **"All that a man has he will give for his life."** Job 2:4

And the affliction is so harsh that Job's own wife becomes a mouthpiece for satan, tempting him,

"Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die." 2:9

To which Job boldly responded, **"You speak as one of the foolish women would speak.**

Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?"

And again, we hear God's verdict: **In all this Job did not sin with his lips.** 2:10

So it wasn't even Job's health that gave or strengthened his faith in the Lord.

In fact, 17 chapters later, Job will give the reason why his health was not the source of his faith:

because he knew that 1) he would die one day and his body would be completely decayed,

but 2) that His living Redeemer, Jesus Christ, would raise his body to life again.

For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will stand upon the earth.

And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God,

whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.

And even in the distress of his failing health, he exclaims, **"My heart faints within me!"** 19:25-27

And in a long Round 3, satan used Job's 3 "friends" Eliphaz, Bildad, & Zophar, to ruin Job's reputation, and to try to cause him to doubt his salvation, as they accused him of hypocrisy,

saying that all the afflictions were God's judgment and punishment upon Job for some secret sin.

In this long conversation between Job and his friends,

Job's was tempted and then fell into the sin of trying to justify himself... and could not justify God.

He felt trapped by the hedge the Lord had placed around, unable to see the protection it provided.

And he accused God of injustice and requested to stand before Him and plead his case against the Lord.

You see, Job wanted to come into God's presence with a very different attitude than the 10 lepers.

They cried out to the Lord in humility seeking mercy, but Job impudently sought justice.

This had to please satan. It seemed that he was finally starting to make headway against Job.

You see, satan's goal wasn't just to make Job suffer in this life – that was just icing on the cake.

Whether by suffering or by prosperity, satan's number one goal is to keep you separated from God,

to make you misbelieve, doubt, and disbelieve in your redeeming and justifying Lord Jesus Christ.

But even as Job boldly – and foolishly – asserts, **I will argue my ways to [God's] face,**

in the same sentence he makes a wonderful confession that is just baffling to the sinful nature.

It is a seemingly irrational statement: **"Though He slay me, I will hope in Him."** 13:15

How could Job say this with such boldness & certainty? (Though God kill him, he would hope in God.)

It's the same reason that God could offer Job to Satan without concern of losing Job as His own child: The Lord is the author and finisher of faith, the One who gave and strengthened Job's trust in his Redeemer and Justifier.

Job was willing to be slain by his Justifier because through Him Job's resurrection was a certainty. In fact, you can actually hear that statement as a foreshadow of Jesus's work of redemption, that though God the Father slayed Jesus on the cross, Jesus committed Himself into God's hands, trusting that the Father would raise Him to life again for your justification and salvation.

Ultimately, the Lord brought Job back from his desire to justify himself through a friend named Elihu. And then the Lord showed Himself to Job and gave him a chance to stand before him, to give account.

Job's response was appropriate: **"Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth."** ^{40:4} ... **I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.** ^{42:3} ... **I had heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes."** ^{42:5-6}

It is in this humility with which we ought always stand before the Lord, aware of our own ignorance... and thanklessness... and our need for His justification.

And it is the Lord's pleasure, as you come into His presence each week, to justify you, that is, to declare you righteous, that you, like Job—covered in Christ's death and resurrection, **are blameless and upright, one who fears God and turns away from evil.**

And know that it is also His delight to *create in you a clean heart and renew a right spirit within you, to restore onto you the joy of His salvation, and uphold you with His free Spirit* by which you, along with the Samaritan, that former leper, may return again and again, week after week, years after year, giving thanks to God, who has cleansed and justified you in His Son.

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria