

JOB'S HARSH WORDS WITH GOD

READ JOB 7:17-21, JOB 10:2-9

Caleb Yoder – 3/22/20

During the season of Lent, we began studying the book of Job. If there was any time of year to work with the book of Job, it seemed like Lent was the time to do it. Lent is a season of confession, of surrender, of contemplating the cross in hope of the resurrection.

The story of Job seemed to fit because it asks these hard questions about where God is when we experience pain. Little did I know how this coronavirus outbreak would evolve in the meantime, or that we would be canceling regular church services. This coronavirus situation makes the topic of suffering real to us, and this is a unique situation, where the whole world is affected by this at the same time. I think that makes Job's story all the timelier, but we have to be patient with Job, because midway through Job isn't very uplifting.

The first week we saw Job lose everything: his children and his many possessions. Yet he blessed God through this, and accepted the new situation. That was in the first two chapters which are called the **prologue**.

As you read on, the bulk of the book is **poetry**. In this part of the book, Job really seems to change. He feels despair and anger. He questions why he has to go through all this. On March 15, Pastor Lois planned to preach about Job's long arguments with his three friends (since we didn't have that service, we recorded a video clip that is on the church website).

This week, we look at how **Job speaks to God** during his hard time. The two passages above are examples. If you read the book of Job all the way through, you might be shocked at what you find. Job isn't at all patient and accepting! He protests.

For example, Job argues with God, "Why won't you look away from me, leave me alone at least long enough for me to swallow my spit? Why have you made me your target?" (7:19-20).

The biblical psalms as well as faithful people throughout the centuries have offered desperate prayers, asking God, "Where are you? Why is your face hidden?"

But Job believes that God is behind his troubles. Job assumes that God is the one that has attacked him. So, his plea isn't "God, why won't you help me," but rather "God, leave me alone! What did I do to you?" As far as I know, Job is the only one in the Bible who says that.

The name Job sounds a lot like the Hebrew word for "enemy." In fact, in 13:24, he says, "Why do you hide your face, and count me as your enemy?" In chapter 10, Job wonders why God went to the trouble to make him, and then turn on him to try to destroy him (v. 9-10).

Job goes even further to angrily tell his friends that God has set up an unjust world. God doesn't care about helping people in need. For example, he says, "If calamity suddenly kills, he mocks at the slaying of innocents. The earth is handed over to the wicked; he covers the faces of its judges. If not God, then who does?" (9:23-24).

As Job criticizes God, Job wishes God would answer, but God will remain silent until chapter 38 – that’s a long time! At the beginning of the book, Job resolutely refused to curse God. But in this section of the book, Job comes awful close to the edge.

No wonder Job’s friends thought he was off his rocker! It seems strange to have words like Job’s in our Bibles. Yet this shows that the Bible gives space for *both* confident proclamation of faith and for questioning. Walter Brueggemann calls this **testimony** and **counter-testimony**.

Job teaches us that God is big enough to handle our strong emotions or our questions. As a righteous man, Job had a solid relationship with God before his life came apart at the seams. In the same way that we can push and challenge the people we know well without severing the relationship, maybe Job’s former trust and faithfulness gives him the boldness to speak to God with brutal honesty.

We need the counter-testimony of Job, because Job gives voice to people in our world who are in pain. We have concerns for how our healthcare system will keep up with coronavirus cases. My heart aches thinking of countries like Honduras, where I once lived, that would have very small healthcare capacity in the first place. Families around the world grieve the loss of loved ones, but at the same time, this crisis has the potential to bring us together, to remind us of a common humanity behind country, culture, language, and ethnicity.

The book of Job is a goldmine in its own right, but as Anabaptists, we read all of the Bible through the lens of Jesus. While Job assumed God was behind his suffering, the God I see revealed in Jesus is not a God who causes tragic suffering whether to punish or for no good reason (see Job 2:3). The story of Jesus teaches us that God brings new life out of the bad, as we see in the resurrection. It also teaches us that God suffers with those in pain, just as God was with Jesus on the cross.

In chapter 10:4, Job asked God, “do you have eyes of flesh? Do you see as humans see?” What Job meant by that is that God is too far and above human beings to understand or care about our problems. To feel that way is understandable. And so many people in our world might be feeling that way.

This is where we have to step a little outside this section of Job to find a message of hope. Our faith in Jesus tells us that God indeed has eyes of flesh, and does in fact see as humans see. That’s Jesus. God was present in Jesus, seeing as humans see through Jesus’ eyes. That’s amazing!

Experience tells us that praying the right way or doing the right things doesn’t necessarily take away our troubles. Maybe Christian faith gives us something even more valuable than having easy lives – finding an inner strength which is the power of the Spirit dwelling within us.

Romans 8:38-39 assures us in the most emphatic terms that there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God that we find through Jesus Christ – “neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation.”

In the prayers or thoughts that you direct with God, feel the freedom to be honest. Yet, know that we are not alone. We have to learn to trust that we are not separated from God’s love, even when it might feel that way. We are connected to each other and to the Spirit of Christ.