

2. Rising above

May 6, 2012

In the last 7 days, I had the flu for two and a half days, then an abscess tooth and its extraction pain for two days. On Thursday afternoon, between the pains in my head and mouth, I murmured, "I feel your pain, Job." By the way, I now have a sinus infection.

What I went through in the last week pales in comparison with what Job is about to have now. He had no idea that he would be the focus of satan's attacks. He is about to face excruciating losses and severe faith tests as he enters the dark tunnel of life trials for unknown period.

Through Job's struggles and triumph by rising above typical humanistic selfishness, we are going to learn valuable lessons that no other books can offer with the exception of this Book, the Bible, the Word of God.

A. ONE DISASTER AND ANOTHER

Job 1:13-19 Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house; 14 and a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, 15 when the Sabeans raided them and took them away--indeed they have killed the servants with the edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you!" 16 While he was still speaking, another also came 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!" 17 While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three bands, raided the camels and took them away, yes, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you!" 18 While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, 19 and suddenly a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead; and I alone have escaped to tell you!"

While Job's livestock were on lazy rolling hills and green pastures; while his family was in prosperity in the land of Uz, one disaster after another started to come to Job.

I don't believe that there was any spiritual significance in these four attacks by satan under the permission from the Sovereign God. So don't make some special spiritual sequence analogy out of these attacks.

However, I must tell you this though. This shows that satan was focused on maximizing his advantage. He was dishing out everything against Job within the limit of God's allowance. Get this folks, any foothold we give to satan is dangerous. We can expect that he will maximize any advantage given to him. To you and I, it might be a tiny compromise, but to satan and his demonic host, it is a big enough foothold. Now he has a room to stand in your life. Don't let it happen.

The first wave of the satanic attacks against Job began. Job hadn't even absorbed the magnitude of his first loss before the next one and next one, finally, the tragic news of the death of all of his children – destroying everything in its path like an enormous tidal wave.

Do you remember the stock market crash between September and November in 2008? According to one media source, the people in the U.S.A. lost \$11 trillion which means that the net worth of American households fell 18%. Just disappeared! How much money has billionaire Warren Buffett lost? \$13.6 billion. You can look at these numbers in a couple of ways. Either be happy your loss isn't in the billions or wish you had billions to lose.

One might raise a question at this point:

"It sounds like God is wagering at the cost of Job's wealth and the lives of his ten children. Isn't that cruel for God to do such a thing?" Yes and no.

"Yes" from satanic and humanistic points of view, it looks like God is doing this just to prove His point to satan. But "Absolutely NO" from God's point of view. It is not a wager to God. After all, He is the Creator of the universe and the Giver of life. The wealth and Job's children were God's to begin with. Even if satan destroys the wealth of Job and his children's lives, God can simply restore the ten lives and riches back to him just as before. If God could not replace them as before, yes, it would have been a wager.

Speaking of death, as a pastor, I've done many funerals and memorial services. But nothing is worse than doing children's funeral. It seems that the pain is too real and the wound is too raw for any parents to manage. There are more questions than answers.

That is the place where a person who faces all these losses can have "face time" with anger, denial, resentment and bitterness toward God. Or simply cry out to Him for His love, comfort, peace, and mercy. At the funeral, I rarely preach. I remind them about God's peace that passes all understanding for that time and more to come.

You and I must learn from this! We never know ahead of time the plans God has for us. Job had no prior knowledge or warning. Our heavenly Father's plan unfolds apart from our awareness. Ours is a walk of faith, not sight. Trust, not touch. Leaning long and hard, not running away. No one knows ahead of time what the Father's plan includes. It's best that way. It may be a treasured blessing; it could be a test that drops us to our knees. He knows ahead of time, but He is not obligated to warn us about it or to remind us it's on the horizon. We can be certain of this: our God knows what is best.

I like what St. Augustine said, "Trust the past to the mercy of God, the present to His love, and the future to His providence."

B. RISING ABOVE

Job 1:20-22 Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. 21 And he said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord." 22 In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.

Quite appropriately, Job mourned his tremendous losses by tearing his robe and shaving his head – a proper outward demonstration of his grief during his time. We might think that after taking these steps, he would lash out at God for letting such terrible calamities happen to him.

Can you imagine that satan anxiously waiting for Job to spew out a long string of curses on God for these disasters? But what he heard next was something unthinkable for him – Job worshiped the Lord.

Does it mean that Job broke into songs of praise and worship? I doubt that. I believe that he was acknowledging the Sovereignty of God who knows his mourning heart. Job refused to give in to bitterness.

The Book of Job goes deeply into the subject of 'theodicy' – the relationship of divine justice to human suffering. This term represents the combination of two Greek words: "theos", meaning "God," and 'dike,' meaning "justice."

The suffering of mankind represents one of life's greatest and most difficult mysteries. In order to gain a godly perspective on our suffering, we must not only acknowledge God's sovereignty, but we also need to understand the difference between God's 'active will' and 'permissive will.'

God often chooses to step into time, working miracles, saving lives, and dramatically answering our prayers. When He does so, He demonstrates His 'active will.' He actively reaches into our lives to change our circumstances. In this way, He demonstrates His love, goodness, and mercy toward us.

But God is also just. When sin entered the world through Adam, suffering was part of the curse that the first man brought on mankind. God allowed this to happen as a result of man's willful disobedience. In so doing, He demonstrated His 'permissive will.'

So, how does this apply to Job's situation? It means that God allowed Job's suffering at the hand of satan, but He didn't cause that suffering. The Lord loved Job immensely and intimately. Thus, He allowed trials in Job's life that would help him grow and mature spiritually. Remember, God saw the future before there was the future of Job. He knew that Job had faith strong enough to pass every test that satan would throw at him.

Do you know how many time the word 'justice' appear in the Bible? For NKJV, 129 times. But the word 'fairness' NEVER appears. While life may not be fair sometimes, but the Word of God tells us that God is always 'just'.

When we face difficult struggles, keep in mind that God isn't punishing you or turning His back on you. In fact, He'll use your trials to draw you into closer fellowship with Himself.

One of the greatest lessons we learn from Job is that "You cannot take it with you." Job recognized that everything including his children in his care was on loan from God. He didn't own it, rather God did. The problem arises when we think we own the things in our lives, but they actually own us.

I found three profound aspects from Job's comment in v21:

1) Job looked back to his birth:

Job 1:21a Naked I came from my mother's womb

Everything was given by God, and the same God who gave it had the right to take it away. Job simply acknowledged that he was a steward.

2) Job looked ahead to his death:

Job 1:21b And naked shall I return there.

Job knew that he couldn't return to his mother's womb, but would be buried in the ground and return to dust. Nothing that we acquire between our birth and death would go with us into the next spiritual world.

1 Timothy 6:7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

3) Job looked up and uttered one of the most magnificent statements of faith in the Bible:

Job 1:21c The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord."

Instead of cursing God, as satan said Job would do, Job blessed the name of the Lord. It is one thing to say, "The Lord gave" or "The Lord has taken away," but it is a completely different thing to say what this man Job said. It shows the real faith in God to say what he did in the midst of sorrow and suffering.

C. APPLICATIONS

1) Don't give an inch to satan. If you do, he will be a ruler over you.

2) Trust the past to the mercy of God, the present to His love, and the future to His providence.

3) When we face difficult struggles, keep in mind that God isn't punishing you or turning His back on you. In fact, He'll use your trials to draw you into closer fellowship with Himself.