

Faith in the midst of Sickness

Text: Job 2:10b “Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?”

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Sermon Summary

Job had faith in the midst in his sickness and there are many lessons we can learn from him. Ultimately it is about God’s Grace in the midst of sickness.

I. Introduction: The book of Job

Text

Job 2:10b “Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?”

The context of this was when Satan was allowed to inflicted disasters and sickness on Job (2:4-10).

- Prior to this Job has lost his 500 oxens and 500 donkeys and his servants killed by the Sabeans (Job 1:14-15);
- a fire from God fell from the sky and burned up his 7000 sheep and servants (1:16);
- his 3000 camels were stolen by the Chaldeans and killed his servants (1:17);
- and his house collapsed killing all his 7 sons and 3 daughters (1:18-19).

And what did Job did in verse 20?

JOB 1:20 At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship ²¹ and said:

*"Naked I came from my mother's womb,
and naked I will depart.
The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away;
may the name of the LORD be praised."*

Satan was not satisfied. Will Job still remain faithful if Job himself was afflicted? (Job 2:4-10)

JOB 2:4 "Skin for skin!" Satan replied. "A man will give all he has for his own life. ⁵ But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face."

JOB 2:6 The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life."

JOB 2:7 So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. ⁸ Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes.

JOB 2:9 His wife said to him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!"

JOB 2:10 He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"

In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.

Job had a great attitude. "Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" It is this wise attitude that gave him faith in the midst of his sickness.

How may we develop such faith?

II. Faith in the midst of sickness

Faith in the midst of sicknesses may be derived from the following principles:

1. We are not alone
2. Everybody dies
3. Pray and take your medications
4. Suffering is a choice
5. Trust and hope in dark times
6. When nothing makes sense
7. Knowing God

1. We are not alone

a. Sense of isolation

One of the most overwhelming things about being ill, aside from the physical pain is the sense of isolation. People who are ill are often alone. Until they start calling other people, no one will know they are not well. The most difficult time is after a consultation in the doctor's clinic and having to come to terms that our bodies have failed us.

b. God knows

God, however, was very much aware of Job and of the wholehearted obedience he sought to render. In fact, God Himself called Satan's attention to Job.

Christ reminded His disciples in **Luke 12:6–7** that God, who even takes detailed note of the sparrows, is much more deeply interested in the affairs of His own children. The Father is aware of everything about us down to the smallest detail.

Even the hairs of our head are numbered. When we are struck with sickness, we can be sure that God knows. This is vitally important to keep in mind to counteract the sense of isolation and loneliness that will often beset us at such times

c. Community of faith

Job's three friends often had a bad reputation and often sarcastically referred to as "Job's comforter" which means "One who is discouraging or saddening while seemingly offering sympathy or comfort". What impressed me was that when they heard of Job's condition, they immediately came to him (Job 2:11-13)

JOB 2:11 When Job's three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, heard about all the troubles that had come upon him, they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him. 12 When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. 13 Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.

They sat with him in silence for one week! What the sick needs is a 'ministry of presence'. Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar only get into trouble when they opened their mouth!

The three friends' argument were basically that Job must have sinned and needed to repent. Eliphaz appeals to his own experience, Bildad refers to the traditions of the fathers and Zophar ask God to speak to Job.

2. Everybody dies

a. Sickness is part of life

World Health Organisation states "Ischaemic heart disease, stroke, lower respiratory infections, chronic obstructive lung disease, diarrhoea and HIV/AIDS have remained the top major killers during the past decade. Tuberculosis is no longer among the 10 leading causes of death, but is still among the top 15, killing one million people in 2011. Chronic diseases cause increasing numbers of deaths worldwide. Lung cancers (along with trachea and bronchus cancers) caused 1.5 million (2.7%) deaths in 2011, up from 1.2 million (2.2%) deaths in 2000. Similarly, diabetes caused 1.4 million (2.6%) deaths in 2011, up from 1.0 million (1.9%) deaths in 2000".

Source: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs310/en/index.html>

Infectious diseases are common killers in children in the developing countries while chronic sicknesses are common in the developed ones. In fact, the older we get, the more prone we are to suffer from some form of sicknesses.

b. Life is not fair

A few months ago, a friend suddenly developed a headache and went into a coma. In the hospital it was discovered that he had intracranial bleeding. He was previously healthy and there was no evidence that he had any problem with his brain. He is a Christian, active in his church, had his own business and his son just got married. We went to Israel together last year. Now he is gone leaving behind a grieving widow and a family that missed him very much.

Fit young people who are slim and very health conscious suddenly die of heart attacks while fat overweight middle aged persons whom everyone expect to die of heart attacks do not.

A doctor friend in Singapore died of SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) while treating patients in 2003. He was active in the Salvation Army.

c. Christians do get sick!

There is a common misconception that Christians do not get sick because Jesus has already healed all our sickness. The proof text quoted is Isaiah 53:3

ISA 53:5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

There is a misconception whether this involves physical or spiritual healing. This is a matter of hermeneutics. The concept of Isaiah 53 is the suffering servants who are to take on the sins of the world. 'Peace' and not 'health' was linked with 'healed'. If all our physical sicknesses are healed then Christians will only die of old age or accidents!

3. Pray but take your medications

a. Divine healing versus physical healing

Divine healing is often mistaken for supernatural healing. Supernatural healings occurs when it goes against the laws of nature. Something that doctors say is against medical principles. One example is Jesus' healing of a paralytic man as noted in Matthew 9:1-8

MT 9:1 Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town. 2 Some men brought to him a paralytic, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven."

MT 9:3 At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, "This fellow is blaspheming!"

MT 9:4 Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? 5 Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? 6 But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . ." Then he said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat and go home." 7 And the man got up and went home. 8 When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to men.

Muscles that are paralysed become atrophied. The joints become hardened and immobile. To be able to get up to and walk means the man has to get new nervous pathways, new muscles, new joints and new sense of balance. According to medical sciences it is impossible to happen instantly.

Please note that Jesus

- Heals to prove that he is the Messiah
- Does not heal everybody
- Is not able heal at some places
- Healing is permanent

Does God heals supernaturally? I still believe that he does. That is why he asks us to pray. But I believe that supernatural healing is rare. God prefers to heals through doctors and the care of people for the sick.

b. Lessons from Nehemiah

Nehemiah faced a lot of resistance when he tried to rebuild the city walls around Jerusalem. The resistance came from both the Jews and the non-Jews.

NE 4:6 So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.

NE 4:7 But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the men of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem's walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. ⁸ They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it. ⁹ But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.

Nehemiah is a very practical person. He prayed but also posted guards.

4. Suffering is a choice

a. Job's choice

Though Job could not begin to understand why all of these things were happening to him, he knew God was aware of it. He did not react, as Satan had predicted, by cursing God. Rather, Job told his wife, "Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" (Job 2:10). Job choose to have faith in a God who is good.

b. Paul on contentment

The apostle Paul expressed similar sentiments when he wrote to the Philippian Christians (Philippians 4:11-13).

11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

In his ministry, Paul has his fair share of sickness. Some scholars postulate that his 'thorn in the flesh' (2 Cor.12;7) is an illness.

c. Choose to adapt

If we have faith in the goodness of God and have learnt contentment, we will learn to accept that we are sick, that sometimes these sicknesses will need us to change our lifestyles and plans for the future.

5. Trust and hope in dark times

a. Trust that God is good and will limits our pain

Job had lost his wealth and his loved ones in a series of sudden calamities. Now his health was gone too. Why? Job was deeply frustrated because he could not make sense out of his trials. Yet in the depths of perplexity and despair he made one of the most profound declarations of faith recorded in the Bible: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" (13:15).

b. Hope

In Job 19 we read the words of anguish that poured from Job's lips. "Know that God has overthrown and put me in the wrong, and has closed His net about me.... He has walled up my way, so that I cannot pass, and He has set darkness upon my paths.... My kinsfolk have failed me, and my familiar friends have forgotten me.... I am repulsive to my wife and loathsome to the children of my own mother" (vv. 6, 8, 14, 17 *Amplified Bible*). Yet even at this low point of anguish and bewilderment, Job declares his heartfelt trust in God. "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth.... I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself" (vv. 25–27).

*JOB 19:25 I know that my Redeemer lives,
and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.
JOB 19:26 And after my skin has been destroyed,
yet in my flesh I will see God;
JOB 19:27 I myself will see him
with my own eyes--I, and not another.
How my heart yearns within me!*

6. When nothing makes sense

a. We do not know why

God has reasons for allowing whatever happens—though we are often at a loss to fathom what they are. In our trials and tests, James encourages us to ask God for wisdom (James 1:5). If we do so in faith, He will surely give it. Whatever the trial or test, there is always growth that can be achieved. Even Jesus Christ Himself learned by the things He suffered (Hebrews 5:8). God wants us to grow. Therefore, we must undergo periodic pruning to stimulate that growth (John 15:2).

b. The reason why is elusive

The first of Job's friends to speak was Eliphaz. He declared, "Remember now, who ever perished being innocent? Or where were the upright ever cut off? Even as I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same" (4:7–8). Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, Job's three friends, were all sure that Job must have had some dirty secret at the root of his newfound troubles. They "knew" there had to be a *reason*. So, they badgered poor Job to confess this suspected secret sin.

Job knew there was no great hidden scandal in his life engendering his trials. He was defensive in the face of his accusers, but he also wondered—"Why?" One of the difficult things for us to accept is that many of the sufferings we go through simply cannot be neatly categorized. The *why* is often elusive. Bad things do not only happen to bad people. Job recognized that many times the wicked live to reach old age and even appear to prosper (21:7–13). There are many *whys* that we will never know in this life.

7. Knowing God

a. Hang on

b. Fruitful

God focuses on the bottom line. He wants us to become like Him. Job was an exemplary man but he had a flaw. The Scriptures say Job's problem was that "he was righteous in his own eyes and that "he justified himself rather than God" (32:1–2). Ultimately Job emerged with a far deeper understanding of the Almighty as well as a deeper understanding of himself and his own human nature. "Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes," Job told God (42:6).

III. Grace in the midst of sickness

Job's suffering can best be understood as compared to Jesus'. Both were innocent, cast down and were restored. Ultimately it is all about grace.

a. God behind the scene

The book of Job shows that God is behind the scene and is aware of what is happening. Sometimes we do not understand why God allowed Satan to do that to Job.

b. God the redeemer

Job has his priority correct because he knew that God is his redeemer. All his suffering will ultimately have meaning because God will redeem it.

c. The blessed hope

The blessed hope is that in the future we will have 'resurrection' bodies – one that will not get sick or decay or die. This hope also promises a new heaven and earth (Revelations 21 & 22).

IV. Conclusion

Job had faith in the midst of his sickness and there are many lessons we can learn from him. Ultimately it is about God's Grace in the midst of sickness.

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