



Christian hope does not promise successful days to the rich and the strong, but resurrection and life to those who must exist in the shadows of death. Success is no name of God. Righteousness is. Jürgen Moltmann

February 3rd Fifth Ordinary Sunday Job 7:1-7

Job: The Righteous man of suffering

Job's world had dramatically crashed around him. He was left breathless. A prominently wealthy and godly man, he lost all his material possessions, all his children, and his health. His wife gave him no support; she even suggested he end his misery by cursing God. Even his friends condemned him rather than console him. To top it all off, God seemed to be ignoring him, refusing for a long time to answer him. His suffering embraced his entire lives. All of this to a spiritually and morally upright man (1:1, 8; 2:3).

Could any form of human suffering seem more *undeserved*? Should not such a righteous person be blessed, not badgered, by God? The fact that Job, an outstanding citizen and upright person, had so much and then lost so much makes him a supreme example of suffering that defies human explanation.

We can all relate to Job in a variety of ways as we ponder why afflictions come our way, or the way of the righteous and innocents. Suffering is hard to comprehend, especially when it strikes the undeserving, those who love God. It is about the mystery of unmerited misery, showing that in adversity God may have other purposes besides retribution for wrongdoing.

Human suffering in perspective

Job's story also addresses the broader challenges of our attitudes to human suffering. Job's agonies illustrate how a person enduring suffering and distress does not automatically need to renounce God or curse Him. Question Him, yes; but not deny Him. Like Job, we may long for an explanation of our experiences; but being unable to comprehend the cause of our misfortune does not mean we then automatically must hold God to blame.

Job teaches us that in asking about the "why" of suffering, as Job did (3:11-12, 16, 20), we are not sinning not wrong. However, to insist that God answer why, as Job also did (13:22; 19:7; 31:15), is

wrong. To insist that God explain one's affliction is inappropriate for it places us above God and challenges God's dominion.

Pain and suffering are unavoidable

These are the consequences of the fall into sin. It is devastating and for all of us inevitable. Still, God can and does use this pain and suffering as His instruments for our ultimate good and for His glory. They *can* be experienced as loudspeakers to get our attention. They remind us that we are weak and limited creatures in need of something beyond what we can manage on our own, what the world offers. Other times God walks alongside of us in our times of darkness, gracing us so that we *can* use our sufferings to reimagine the way we live in the Kingdom, refining us as silver is refined in fire. They *can* help us grow in faith and strengthen our hope if we keep our eyes on God instead of those things seeking to crush our lives.

In our suffering, God calls us into a deeper, more intimate relationship with Himself. He does this to empower us to become His witnesses in the world, reminding all peoples that through sacrificially sharing in the sufferings of His Son, in faith and with enduring hope, the world will be blessed. Moving through our sufferings in this way humiliates Satan, breaking his power over the souls of many.

What Job cannot see is any sense of purpose in his suffering. Like some dumb beasts he simply endures all things in the darkness of hopelessness. This is why he ends up challenging God – "Why"? But there is no answer to the why of suffering, just that it is an inevitable characteristic of all human living. While we do not know why we must go through the things that assail us, we do

have a clear guarantee for we know that *God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them (Romans 8:28).*

Suffering and miracles

As much as we might want God to bring an end to our suffering, and the sufferings of those we love, that is not the way faith and life works. We suffer because we are human, weak and fragile creatures bound for the grave. The miracle is that in and through our suffering in faith and with hope, God achieves His good and gracious purposes. Was this not the case when God allowed Joseph's brothers to sell him to the Egyptians? God used the sins of the brothers, and the faith of Joseph to bring salvation to many people. Sometimes God allows us to suffer so that we can bring Him praise and thanksgiving, bringing Christ to others. He comforts *us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.*

On our own, we are not good people. By the grace of God, we are. Through the perfect life, the innocent death, and the glorious resurrection of Jesus, God has made us His children, His saints, His holy ones. This does not mean life will be a bed of roses, but we have been reminded of how Jesus has *overcome the world.*

Like Job, we will have our fair share of trials and tribulations in life. But like Job, we also share a common faith in our Savior. Out of the depths of Job's darkness come some of the most beautiful phrases in Scripture, words that have become a magnificent Easter hymn:

I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth...and in my flesh I will see God...

The Kingdom: Always the Kingdom

That is what Jesus came to do. He came to us to proclaim the message of the gospel. And the message of the gospel is greater and more important than simply healing the sick. The message of the gospel is that *the time is fulfilled*, and the kingdom of God is coming to us through Jesus. This is greater than the healing even of

many who were sick. And today, the message of the gospel is also bigger than the healing of we who are sick.

God still heals the sick in our day. But the kingdom of God means more than that. It means an end to *all* sickness and *all* death, an end to *all* suffering and all pain and all mourning. No more tears. Only joy. That is what God intends for us. And that is why Jesus came. It our destiny, our hope the light leading us through darkness.

But the *only* way for Jesus to do all that is on the cross. That is where the final healing takes place. On the cross. And the forgiveness of our sins. That is why Jesus did not just stay in Capernaum, but left there to proclaim the message of the gospel throughout Israel, before going to the cross for us all. Healing was a sign of all these things.

And that is why He invites us today to believe this Good News. Whether we are sick or well, depressed or happy, rich or poor, deserving or not, God offers to us ultimate healing through the forgiveness of our sins. Through the death and resurrection of His only begotten Son.

Sickness and death do not have the last word in our life. God does. And that last word will not be sickness or death, but will be life in Jesus' name. Jesus heals those in Capernaum to offer a clear sign that God cares for us. But that is not the full reason Jesus came. In today's gospel reading, it is very telling to see what happens *after* Jesus heals all those who were sick. It would have been easy for Jesus to stay there and continue that healing ministry in Capernaum. But that's not what He does. Instead, He gets up early the next day, and goes to a deserted place to pray.

Today's gospel reading is just a preview of that glorious day to come when Jesus returns. On that great and glorious day, we will all receive the same gift that Simon Peter's mother-in-law received, the day Jesus found her in bed with a fever. On that day He will take our hands and bring us to His Father. To healing. To Life.

That is God's plan for us all. That is why Jesus went to the cross for us. There is no greater promise, and no greater gift. Thanks be to God. Amen.