*Hebrews 11:32-40 Job 2:1-10 (New Living Translation)*

***Forgotten Lessons from Job (Part 1)***

 Last week we witnessed some of the great heroes of the faith recounted in Hebrews 11 … Now, that chapter never mentions Job – in fact the only NT book that *does* is the letter of James, at the end, when it calls Job a “man of great patience and endurance.” Nevertheless, I definitely believe he’s *implied* among the figures of which Hebrews says, “Time would fail me to tell you about …” because he was *clearly* one of those *made strong out of weakness*.

 If we were to *squeeze* the theme of the whole book into a short statement it would be: “The child of God facing great trials” … And there are *many* in our church now facing different kinds of trials, which Job’s experience speaks to – inoperable cancer, severe physical pain in different parts of their body with little or no relief … great disappointment as a possible solution to a medical concern disappears … legal hoops to jump through, red tape to trip over … doors closing and no others seeming to open … relationships strained to the point of breaking … and more … So for the next several weeks we’re going to explore some forgotten lessons from Job, so we *too* may be made strong out of weakness!

 The primary tone of the story is one of suffering, particularly unexplainable suffering. In chapter one, God allows Job to lose all his sons and daughters in a tornado, all of his herds too, which today would be akin to losing your life’s savings. A short time later, God allows Job to suffer from a horrible disease of oozing sores. It was so bad that Job was disfigured and his friends didn’t recognize him. Job remained committed to God, but he started asking a question … **Why?** …

 Children never tire of asking why, yet the question produces a bitter taste the older we get … We notice that the world seems to run by a system of cause and effect, yet there are some effects … for which we can’t find a clear cause … Some suffering seemingly has no rhyme or reason. It’s *not* caused by another person’s sin *or* our own. It’s just tragic and no explanation will do. The category doesn’t fit neatly into any box … Many people think that believing in God protects them from trouble, so when calamity comes, they question God’s goodness and justice. That’s why God gave us Job; the message of Job is: you should not give up on God because he allows you to have bad experiences. In v. 10, Job wisely says to his wife, “Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad?” *[Faith in God does not guarantee personal prosperity, and lack of faith does not guarantee troubles in this life. If that were so, people would believe in God simply to get rich and stay healthy.]*

God *is* capable of rescuing us from suffering, but he may also allow suffering to come for reasons we can’t understand. And it’s Satan’s strategy to get us to doubt God at *exactly* this moment! Job shows a perspective *broader* than his own personal comfort or happiness … To those so quick to ask “Why” at the smallest misfortune, Job’s faithfulness seems incredible – and I mean that in the literal sense of the word *incredible* – “extremely hard to believe.” But even Job had something to learn … *We* can learn with him.

 I have a video clip to share with you – but since it’s 11 minutes long, we’re going to split it up among the next few sermons, so make sure to come to get the other parts. Wiebke, please. ***[First part of video clip here – Start to 4.34’]***

 As we move through this series, I want you to *remember* that *most* of the book is a dialogue between Job and his friends, who are quite convinced that he’s done something to deserve the tragedy that’s befallen him … There’s FORTY-TWO chapters in Job, but 35 of the chapters in the middle are often ignored in preaching *and* Bible studies. However, the sheer volume of that conversation between Job and his friends reminds us that the *pain* and *waiting* and *angst* of our ordeal makes up the bulk of what we face, and God *acknowledges* that in the many forgotten pages of this ancient, but living story.

At the end God interrupts and finally tells Job’s friends that they’re wrong – sorry *for the spoiler* … but interestingly, God never *really* answers the "Why?" question … Instead, he *changes* the question. *That* I won’t ruin for you, but for 40 chapters, we hold our breath waiting … Yet *isn’t* that how life is? …. Isn’t that how it *feels*? … The waiting? …

Our age of instant everything has caused us to lose the ability to wait. Of all that we want now, relief from pain is at the top of our list. We want an instant cure for everything from toothaches to heartbreaks. Although some pains have been cured, we still live in a world where many people suffer in a way we sometimes call “needless.” But Job was not expecting instant answers for the intense emotional and physical pain he endured. In the end, what broke Job’s patience was not the suffering, but not knowing *why* he suffered.

I’m giving you an overview to let you know that there’s not always going to be an answer to our suffering - at least not in this life. When you stand by people who undergo suffering, beware of offering cliché answers. When you endure it, don’t expect to know why. You can *ask*, and you can *hope* for an answer, but you may not be able to figure it out. Job was given to us to both *acknowledge* that, and to direct our attention to something *bigger*.

There’s an old little book that played a part in inspiring this sermon series … It’s entitled, *Job: A Man Tried as Gold*, by Theodore Epp. When I was starting seminary, my grandmother gave me some of her Bible study and resource books – my grandmother has played a huge part in my faith development … and this book was actually a gift to her before being passed to me. I want to read you the note on the inside cover, written by a friend of hers, who had faced great trials in her life, medical and otherwise … Keep in mind this was given to my Grandma Julie before I was born, so about 40 years ago … ***[PUT ON SCREEN AND read inside cover of Grandma’s book]***

So how do we respond to suffering? … Betty, like Job, had learned, EVEN THOUGH WE DON’T have the answer, we still put our trust in the Lord. And further guidance is found in Romans 5:3-4 – “We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces endurance; endurance produces character *[deepening our faith]*; and character produces hope *[living in faith until knowledge comes].*”

 Let me share a quote from Cliffe Knechtle … “Although I do not know why God allowed evil, I do know that he wants to destroy it. That is why there is a hell.  Although I do not know why God allowed pain, I do know he wants to wipe every tear from our eyes and give us joy for eternity in his presence. That is why there is a heaven. Although I do not know why God allowed suffering, I do know God is a suffering God who became human in Jesus, suffered and died on the Cross in order to forgive you and me” *(end quote)*
 Even if God allows us to suffer, that doesn’t detract from his goodness or his power, for in the midst of our doubt and suffering, God doesn’t forsake us. He can use those experiences to our benefit, even if we don’t understand … I *might* be able explain suffering *theologically* as a precondition of our free will, but I don’t think that’s what the average struggling person is looking for … I may be able to describe the value of suffering through the lens of discipleship, and there’s definitely a place for that. But the truth is, if preachers and theologians and scholars are honest, we still don’t have all the answers … but as God reveals to Job, sometimes those answers aren’t the *most* important. *Knowing God* is better than knowing answers.

 And sometimes there are more *fundamental questions* anyway! We’re going to look at a few of those over the coming weeks, so I hope you’ll join us, and I encourage you to read all those middle chapters in Job – a lot of it is in the form of Hebrew poetry, and it may seem repetitive, but our suffering, is like that too …

 Let me close with this: about 1/3 through the book, in chapter 13, Job says of God in the midst of his trials, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” He knew God would not fail … You, too, may be sure that he will not fail you in the end. All may be overcast and gloom and sadness … But take heart, saint of God. The Lord will undertake … as he undertook for Job. Perhaps in your affliction, God is trying to speak to your heart. C.S. Lewis once said, “Pain is God’s megaphone.”

 It may be that you do not know him as your Lord. Even now, he is drawing you to himself. After all, Christ knows *all* about suffering … If you think it unfair that God witnessed Job’s suffering *aloof* and *from afar* … remember the cross … where he experienced Job’s suffering and *all* of ours … The Redeemer that Job looked for lives today, and he wants to deliver you from the heavy load of sin, and walk with you to help carry your *other* burdens. As he said to the Apostle Paul after refusing to take away his thorn, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

*Amen*.

***Closing Prayer***
Merciful and Loving God,
 We come to you this morning needing a “theology check” … because we scatter the blame for our problems all around … We come to you this morning knowing that as your disciples … we are to face suffering as an opportunity to draw closer to you and to others. We come to this place … understanding that we will not understand it all.

But Lord, we struggle with suffering. We struggle applying all of our learning and all of our knowledge when we are in the midst of pain … Forgive us when we fail to put our trust in you. Forgive us when we become selfish and self-centered. Forgive us when we try to avoid the suffering that you would have us to learn from.

We are no longer ours, but yours. Put us where you want us to be, and give us contentment in that station regardless of where we see others around us. Put us to be doing what you have called us to do. Put us to suffering as you would have us suffer. Let us have all things in Christ, or let us have nothing.

In the name of Christ we pray… Amen.

***Benediction***
As we leave this place, may the cause you suffer for be just. May the pain that you experience for Christ, be beneficial. May the love of a merciful God be never too far away. So that until we meet again, you may feel his love as he holds you in the palm of his hand. Amen.