

Sermon Transcript from May 29th, 2016
Job: The Curtain Behind the Universe
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Okay. Please turn your Bibles to the book of Job in the middle of the Old Testament. Or, if you are new to the Bible, "job." And, if you've ever said that, don't feel bad. It does say "j-o-b" in English. So, don't worry about it. Hey, it is Memorial Day weekend. How many of you have the day off tomorrow? Bring it on. How many of you work in retail and don't? Yep. We love you. We will do our best to tip well. I'm so sorry.

But, you know, it's interesting. Tonight, we start a brand new series on the problem of evil. And I think it's a fitting weekend for it just because Memorial Day is odd. Like, it's become a holiday where we go camping or to the beach or barbecue with family and friends at a park tomorrow. Like, our missional community's doing a picnic. That's kind of the tenor of the holiday. But actually, as most of you know, it started out as a national day of grief right after the Civil War. It was a way to face the horror and the gut wrenching reality of brother killing brother and to, as a nation, come together and lament the lose of a brother, of a friend, of an uncle, of a parent, of a father, of all sorts of people lost in the war.

So, I think it's an interesting time to step into this conversation. Even though a lot of us are kind of in holiday mode, I think it is fitting. And we're calling this series "The Sage on the Problem of Evil and the Even Greater Problem of Good."

Because, next up in our reading through the Bible as a community is the Hebrew wisdom literature. So, we're done with all the prophets before the exile. Don't say "yes." You can think it, but just don't say it out loud. Alright? We will not judge you, but God will. And we're not into the Hebrew wisdom literature, which is so great. So, we have been reading through Job over the last week or two. If you're behind, don't worry about it. Do your best to catch up or just jump in with the reading tomorrow. Tomorrow we actually finish Job. So, you get to the best part of the book if you're behind. And then, after that, we start Proverbs.

One of the major questions of the Sage – and that's kind of, in academic speak, the name for the writer of the Hebrew wisdom literature. Whether it's Proverbs or Ecclesiastes or Song of Songs, it's this kind of sage, guru figure. And one of the questions that the sage is wrestling with all through the Hebrew wisdom literature – not only in Job, but also in Proverbs and the rest, Ecclesiastes in particular – is what we today call "the problem of evil."

Put simply, how do you square a God who created the universe out of love with the reality of what you read day after day on your morning news app? With an infant child born with a physical deformity or a mental handicap? With child abuse? With the refugee crisis in Europe right now? With ISIS in the Middle East? With cancer? With a chronic illness? With a follower of Jesus that is dealing for a decade or longer with mental illness? With death itself? How in the world does all of that fit together?

And the question is nothing new. People have been wrestling with this for millennia. I mean, Job is at least three millennia old. So, we're not going to solve it in the next 40 minutes. I hate to break it to you. But, we're not going to solve it. But, the plan for tonight is to lay out kind of the basic idea of Job. To kind of put it all on the table and then to take another two or three weeks to just kind of sort through it all and hopefully make sense of what the library that is the Bible has to say about the problem of evil.

Okay? Fantastic. Thanks, Dan. One man for me there. Well done. Let's invite the Holy Spirit.

Holy Spirit, we know You're already here. But, we just ask that You would take center stage. I'm up here. I have to do my thing, open my big mouth and teach. And that's an honor and a privilege. But, I ask that even as I do that that You would work through me, through the Scriptures, through the mind and the heart of every man and woman here. And I ask that You would start to make Your voice known to every man and woman here. As we move toward prayer response after the teaching, I just ask that You would do a work of power and a work of presence. That You would just really manifest Yourself in a healing way.

God, I pray for comfort over our community. Over our whole community. The entire thing. But, in particular over those that are here tonight that are suffering. Whether it's something major like we see in Job or something far more minor. Just dealing with a

disappointment of life this side of resurrection. Holy Spirit, I just ask You to come, to have Your way, to comfort. I pray for wisdom as I navigate a tricky book to exegete. I pray for humility and an open mind for myself, for everybody here. I pray that we would have ears to hear not only what I have to say or not even what Job has to say, but, at the end of the day, what You, Holy Spirit, have to say over our church. So, come. Amen.

Job is a work of art. I mean, it's just a stunning piece of literature. The genre of literature that we are about to unpack is an ancient, epic poem. So, it reads kind of like – if you remember when you were a senior in high school – Shakespeare's MacBeth. It tells a story, but it does so through poetry, not prose. So, think of it kind of like a play. That, for me, is helpful. But, it opens with a prologue, chapters 1 and 2, that is narrative. It's not poetry. And the prologue is actually one of the most important parts of the book because it lets you, the reader, in on a secret that the protagonist, Job, does not know and, I hate to give away the ending, but he never finds out. Okay? So, this is quite important.

Job 1:1. Let's get into it: **"In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. He had seven sons and three daughters, and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East."**

So, ladies and gentlemen, Job. Job, Bridgetown Church. He's rich. He's famous. He's a man of faith, right? He's blameless. He's upright. Fantastic guy. But then, watch what happens. Look down at 6.

Job 1:6: **"One day the angels..."** – or, depending on your translation, the sons of God – **"...came to present themselves before the Lord, and..."** – in my Bible it reads "Satan" or maybe in yours it read "the Satan" – **"...Satan also came with them. The Lord said to the Satan, 'Where have you come from?'"**

"The Satan answered the Lord, 'From roaming throughout the earth, going to and fro.'"

Okay. For those of you that are already kind of skeptical about the Bible, remember this is an ancient, epic poem. Okay? This is not a history textbook. Don't read it literally; read it literarily. The imagery here in the poetry is of heaven as an ancient Near Eastern throne room and God is kind of like the king. He's on the throne. And then in the throne room is God's court. So, imagine a king with his governor and his judge and his lawyer and his advisor to make decisions and a messenger. And everybody is kind of there around the throne. All of God's angels, in my Bible, or, depending on your translation, sons of God. That was a Hebrew moniker for the spiritual beings that populate heaven and that, shoulder to shoulder with God, the King, run the universe. Okay?

So, God is there. He's in the court and then, in my mind's eye, it's kind of like I imagine – this is me – a movie set in the medieval time period. Like, think of Robin Hood. Not the Ridley Scott Robin Hood, although I was like the one person that was really into that movie. I thought it was great. And those of you, you just don't know what you're missing out on. But, imagine. Anybody seen the old Errol Flynn Robin Hood from back in spandex days? That Robin Hood? Nobody? I think it was in black and white. Oh my gosh. I grew up on that movie.

So, I imagine something like that in my mind's eye. There's a kind, there's a throne room, there's all sorts of people in the throne room, the court. And then it's like the back door bursts open and the bad guy walks into the throne room. And he's dressed in all black and he's sinister and he has jet black hair or whatever. And it's like the evil little brother of the prince who's conniving and next in line or whatever. Or it's the general, the leader of the rebellion up in the north or whatever. And he comes in and, in the story, his name is "ha Satan" in Hebrew. Or, more literally, "the Satan." And we're not exactly sure if, at this point in the library that is the Bible, that's a proper name or is it a title? All "ha Satan" means in Hebrew is "the accuser."

So, a villain of some kind comes into God's throne room in the imagery here and he starts to go at it in dialogue with God. God says, "Listen, where do you come from?"

And notice his answer there. "From roaming throughout the earth going to and fro on it."

That's a way of saying, "It's none of your business. I do my own thing. I'm not under your authority. I do my own thing. Alright?"

So, there's this exchange here between God, the King, and the villain in the story, ha Satan, or "the adversary." And look what happens next:

"Then the Lord said to the Satan, 'Have you considered by servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.'"

And that's kind of weird right there. It's almost like God is egging the Satan on.

And then Job 1:9: **"Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. 'Have you not put a hedge around him?'"**

That, by the way, is where the cliché comes from. You all know it. It's in the top three worst Christian clichés of all time. "Hedge of protection." I'm always like, "Why are you praying for a hedge? This isn't like 18th century England. We don't need a hedge, you know? Pray for a concrete wall or something. We know how to do better now. But, this is where it comes from.

"Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face."

Okay. So, here's what's going on. This is a public shame in an honor shame society. The accusation here – there's really two accusations. The first, the Satan or the accuser is saying, "Hey, God. Job doesn't actually love You for You. He loves You for all of the blessings. Of course he loves you. He's rich. He's famous. You bless him. You don't curse him. He doesn't actually love You for You."

But then there's a second, deeper accusation. Not about Job, but about God Himself, and it is essentially, as I read it, "God, You're kind of like a corrupt politician. You manipulate people with blessing and cursing to get what You want. To get people to vote for You. To get people to love You and worship You. 'Hey, love me and worship me and I will bless you. Don't love me and don't worship me and I will curse you.' You manipulate. You're like a corrupt politician, essentially, and a control freak."

Okay. So, that's the accusation here from the Satan to God Himself. It's almost like Satan bets against God. "Hey, I dare You. I bet against You. Take away Job's life of blessing and there is no way he will love You."

But, the crazy thing is God takes the bet. Look at 12.

"The Lord said to Satan, 'Very well, then.'"

"Okay. My money's on Job. Not on you."

"Everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger."

Now, notice that the Satan wants God to strike Job. "Hey, you do it God."

And God says what? "No? I don't do that. I'm not like that. You are the one that wants to ruin Job's life. Not me."

But, what God does is lift up His hand of protection off of Job's life. And, if you're thinking, "Wait, what?" Exactly.

Now, does the story say why right here? That's an honest question. Does it say why God does this? No – and spoiler alert, I hate to give away the next 40 chapters, but we never find out why. So, if you open your Bible and you're like, "I want to know what the Bible has to say about the problem of evil. Why do bad things happen to good people," and you open it up to Job, man, don't get your hopes up. It's just not. There's other places and we'll talk more about that next week. But, man, it is just not anywhere close to clear. Okay? Because this is a story about something else. Now, keep reading.

"Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord."

"One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, a messenger came to Job and said, 'The oxen were plowing and the

donkey's were grazing nearby, and the Sabeans attacked and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!

"While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, 'The fire of God fell from the heavens and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!'

"While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, 'The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!'

"While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, 'Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!'"

Tragedy strikes. And, because it's a poem and we have no idea whether not there is history behind it or not. No way to know. But, because it's a poem, it's hyper-stylized, it's worst case scenario. Like, the servant comes one after the next after the next. His sons all die, his daughters all die, his wealth is gone, his life is literally destroyed from top to bottom. All that he's left with, if you read chapter 2, is his wife and she is horrible.

At one point she says to Job, her one line in the entire story, is, "Curse God and die."

Those of you sisters that want to get married someday, that's great. Don't ever say that to your husband. It's like Satan is going through Job's life, "I'll kill. I'll take this. I'll take this. Whoa. Your wife? You can keep her. That's all you, bro. That's all you. I don't even want her in Hell. That's all you."

That's how bad she is, alright? So, he's left with nothing at all. And then verse 20.

"At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head."

That was a way to express grief in the ancient Near East.

"Then he fell to the ground..." – watch this – **"...in worship and he said:"**

And here's that famous line.

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

"In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing."

Now, before we get into this, disclaimer: there's all sorts of debate and controversy about how to interpret the book of Job. It's actually quite tricky. So, I've been at work at it all week and I love it, but it's a bit of a can of worms. So, I just want to start off with one disclaimer, and that is I'm about to lay out my reading of Job, my take on it – and I'm not alone. This is with a whole bunch of other people. I think it's the one that for me, by far, makes the most sense. But, there are other readings out there.

I say once in a while that, you know, my best guess is that about 80-90% of what I say on a Sunday here at Bridgetown is right and about 10-20% of what I say is wrong. Now, hopefully not like heresy wrong. If so, go to another church. But like, wrong or off or misinformed or "yeah, but" or "that's not actually what it means there" or whatever. Here's the problem: I don't know which 20% is wrong. That's the problem. It's not like, "Oh, the wrong part. Here we go."

You know? I don't know which part is wrong. So, that's why the Bible is the authority, not my take on the Bible. And it's why we all have to read and study the Bible together. That's why I have elders. All of that stuff. So, all that to say I'm about to lay out my reading on Job and, if you don't buy what I have to say in the next 10 or 15 minutes, that's fine. When we get to the end and circle around, the ending part is I'm on common ground across the spectrum. There's very few people that would disagree with that. So, if you don't like the next 10

minutes, just wait.

Now, to start off, I want to talk about this line: **"The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised."**

That is, without a doubt, the most iconic line in Job, if not one of the most iconic lines in all of the Old Testament. I mean, to this day, we hear it on a regular basis in a time of tragedy. So, you're at the funeral and the parent, the dad or whatever is up there after the death of a child and weeping he says, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised."

The entrepreneur, she's risked everything to follow and chase after a dream that God put in her heart. She felt like the Holy Spirit said, "Step out in faith. Risk it," and here she is five years later. It's a disaster. She's in bankruptcy court. It's all a mess. And, over coffee, she says to you, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised."

Now, this line, it sounds so good and so right. It sounds so godly, right? And it kind of is. I mean, this is amazing. Job's response to worship and, "The Lord gives and the Lord has taken away," it's absolutely amazing. But, what if it's actually not right? What if it's actually wrong? What if that line is actually bad theology? Think about it. Job is saying the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. In Job's mind, he thinks that God did all of this to him. He thinks that God is the one who killed his seven sons, that God killed his three daughters, that God destroyed his life.

Now, you know the prologue; Job is oblivious. You know it. Is that true or not? It's not true. Alright? There's this whole other character in the plot. The Satan. None of this was God's idea. Now, God's involved. God does not get off the hook for it. But, none of this was God's idea. There's no, "Oh, God has a plan for Job's life." None of that. This is random. It's haphazard. It's the door bursts open and the Satan and "I dare you."

Like, none of this was God's idea at all. But, Job thinks it was. Now, in my reading of Job, I would argue that the line right here is not only wrong, but that the whole point – at least one of the main points of Job – is to show you that it's wrong. There's a fascinating dynamic in Job that you already see at play. Because of the prologue, you, the reader, know what's really going on. It's like we get to see behind the curtain of the universe into heaven itself. We know, "Okay, this whole thing wasn't God's idea. It was the Satan's idea and God said 'yes' to it and that's really weird and funky, but it wasn't God who did this. It was Satan who did this."

So, you see all of this. Job does not. Not here and never at any point in the future. He thinks "God killed my kids. God destroyed my life. All of this was God." And his opening salvo is "May the name of the Lord be praised."

But, those of you that read Job over the last week or two, does this last? No. It does not last at all. Now, from here, if you skip down, we next read about Job's friends. So, next is the crazy wife and then we go down to Job 2:11.

"When Job's three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, 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. 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. 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."

And, from here on, the lion's share of the book, from chapter 3 all the way to 37, is a debate, an argument, back and forth between Job and his friends about the problem of evil. Now, here's the thing: both Job and his friends work off the same – in my humble opinion – bad theology. What I mean by that is both Job and his friends believe that it was God who destroyed Job's life. But, this leads Job and his friends to two very different conclusions. Let me show you both. First, let me show you Job's friends. Turn to chapter 4, just a page or so to the right. And, one example out of many, skip down to Job 4:7. This is his first friend, Eliphaz.

"Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed? As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it."

Right? You reap what you sow.

"At the breath of God they perish;" – and God deals with it – "at the blast of his anger they are no more. The lions may roar and growl, yet the teeth of the great lions are broken. The lion perishes for lack of prey, and the cubs of the lioness are scattered."

God takes care of people that love and worship God. Now, what Job's friends essentially argue right here and all through the book is a formula of cause and effect. What goes around comes around. You reap what you sow. Bad things happen to bad people; good things happen to good people. And it's based on this idea of justice that God is just and, therefore, the world that we live in is also just. This view is still around. You see it a lot in the prosperity gospel thing, which is more popular right now than ever before. You see it a lot, actually, in this whole genre of hip-hop with hip-hop rappers that kind of have Christian roots. So, I hope you all have the new Chance the Rapper record. Right? How good is that? I'm so white and it's so good. If all rap was like that, I would listen to rap every single day of the week. Okay?

So, did you guys read that critic who said, "This album makes me want to become a Christian?" It's so dang good. Anyway, his single there is a great example. You all know it. If you don't, go download it as soon as you get home tonight.

"When the praises go up," – what? – "the blessings come down."

You know it. When the praises go up, the blessings come down. And the next line is, "Blessings keep falling in my lap."

Right? Because I'm rich and famous or whatever. So, that's the formula at play. "When the praises go up, the blessings come down." And the idea here is if you love and worship God, He will bless you and keep cursing far from you. But if you don't, on the flip side, don't love and don't worship God, watch out, because it just might go the other direction. Now, is this true? This formula, is it true?

There you have it. Yes, and no. I mean, there are bits and pieces of truth, for sure, in it. "You reap what you sow." That's a line from the New Testament. Like, it's not all wrong. It's not entirely right; it's not entirely wrong. As a general principle, yeah, kind of, sort of. But, what about when the praises go up and curses come down? Like, that's not a hit single at all. But, that's Job's life. Some of you say, "Yeah, that's my life," or, "That was me 10 years ago," or, "That was this or that or the other."

I mean, think about the poetry right here. Look at Job 4:7.

"Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished?"

Lot's of people. Lot's of people. I mean, I think of the students from Sandy Hook Elementary School. I think of every baby ever aborted. Lot's of people. Look at that next line.

"Where were the upright ever destroyed?"

Uh, Jesus comes to mind. And all of the apostles and every single martyr for faith in Jesus down through history. I mean, this is not all wrong, but it's most definitely not right. Job's friend's view is way too simplistic. Yes, God is just. But, the world that we live in, at least right now, is not just. And the world does not run off this simplistic formula. God does not run off this simplistic formula, "When the praises go up, the blessings come down," that you and I can manipulate and control to our own advantage. That's just not how it works.

But, that is essentially Job's friend's take. Now, let me show you Job's take. It's not really all that much better. Turn over to Job 9. Job and his friends are back and forth and, at first, Job's line is amazing. "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away." That's amazing. He's just like a rock at first. But then, after a while, he starts to cave in. He starts to despair and then he starts to doubt, not God's existence, but God's character. And, you know, I see this a lot, in particular as a pastor when I officiate a funeral. Over the years I have started to notice a trend. Often, for a follower of Jesus, when tragedy strikes, in particular the death of a loved one, at first it's like – some people, not everybody – some people are amazing. You're at the funeral and there's the widow or the widower or the mom or the dad or the child or the spouse or whatever

and it's like faith in God, rock solid, "I trust God. I know that God is at work in all of it."

It's amazing. But, I keep beginning to notice this. Everybody else goes back to life. Family friends go back to life a week later. You know, you're watching Netflix or whatever. And a week goes by, a month goes by, a year goes by and then that person is still in an empty house or an empty apartment. Everybody else has moved on, but that person is still right in the thick of Hell on earth. Grief, trauma, starts to despair, starts to doubt, starts to get angry with God. And listen, if that's where you're at or have been at, that's not an insult to you at all. That's just human. That's just what life is like. That's exactly what Job is like.

At first, chapter 1, "raise the name of the Lord." And then, by the end, he is just railing against God. So, for example here in chapter 9 as he starts to cave in, look at what he writes in Job 9:21.

"Although I am blameless, I have no concern for myself; I despise my own life."

So, he's just crazy depressed here.

"It is all the same; that is why I say, 'He [God] destroys both the blameless and the wicked.'"

Is that true? Yeah, not really.

"When a scourge brings sudden death [illness, disease], he [he's the one] mocks the despair of the innocent. When a land falls into the hands of the wicked," – you know, oppression or what we see right now in the Middle East – **"he blindfolds its judges. If it is not him, then who is it?"**

So, Job just starts to list tragedy after tragedy, war, invasion, disease, a plague, and in Job's mind, all of that is God. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Therefore, he starts to follow that to its logical conclusion. That means that either God is amoral or immoral. If God is a judge, He's like a blind, corrupt, unjust judge. That's what He's saying right here. Look over at Job 10. One page to the right.

Job 10:15: **"If I am guilty—woe to me! Even if I am innocent, I cannot lift my head, for I am full of shame and drowned in my affliction."**

I mean, this dude is just not in a good space.

"If I hold my head high," – listen to this – **"you [God] stalk me like a lion and again display your awesome power against me."**

Notice the lie here that Job is believing. Job thinks that God is like a lion who plays with His prey, just starts to mess with it, before He eats it alive. Now, is this true? Is that what God is like? No. Are we supposed to believe this about God? Are we supposed to read this and believe that? No. In fact, if you know your Bible well, in the library that is the Bible, who's the character that is actually called a roaming lion? Satan. In the New Testament in 1 Peter 5.

Job – pay attention to this – thinks that God is like Satan. Some people's theology, in particular what people believe about God, is so off base that they think of God as more like Satan than like Jesus. There's a famous story that I probably should not tell because I will probably get a nasty email, but here we go. Great story about two famous preachers from about 200 years ago. John Wesley, he was a famous Armenian, said at one point to George Whitfield, who was the famous Calvinist of the day – this was like a Twitter war before there was Twitter. It was in a newspaper. Okay? It was just horrible. Yeah. We're in the right direction.

So, at one point he said to his Calvinist friend, George Whitfield, "Your God is my devil."

And what he meant is, "How you think about God is so off base that when you say "god," that's what I think of when I say "the devil." Like, that – wow. That's really intense. Now, if you're a Calvinist, I apologize. I don't mean that in an offensive way. My point is that what you see here in the story is that, to the degree that people – don't take Satan seriously, they attribute his evil to God's hand. Does that make sense?

So, this is exactly what's going on here. "You're like a lion. You tear my life apart. You're

cruel." This is how Job thinks about God or at least how he feels about God. But then, he's kind of all over the map. So, turn the page to chapter 13 and then let me give you, on the whole other side of the spectrum, he has these moments of breakthrough.

Job 13:13: **"Keep silent..." – "Okay, shut up" – "...and let me speak; then let come what may. Why do I put myself in jeopardy and take my life in my hands?"**

And then I love this line. It's like, oh my gosh, the echo here.

"Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him."

Wow. That's a really amazing statement.

"I will surely defend my ways to his face. Indeed, this will turn out for my deliverance, for no godless person would dare come before him!"

So, Job is all over the map, right? His emotions are just up and down. One moment he feels like God is his enemy and then the next moment there's a deep, bedrock trust in God that he just can't let go of. But, even here, you notice his goofy theology. "Though He slay me, though He's the one who does evil to me, I will still trust Him."

And as much as I love his faith and his hope and his trust in God, he still has an odd take on life. My point is this: at first, if you watch the narrative arch of the book, Job doesn't charge God with wrongdoing. We read that in chapter 1. But, by the end, he charges God with a lot of wrongdoing. Because he follows his theory: "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised." He follows that theory to its logical conclusion: God did this to me, God killed my family, God destroyed my life. And he ends up in a very dark place.

Now, to spare you reading the whole thing, Job and his friends go at it for the whole book, back and forth. And what makes the book confusing to read – was it hard to read for you or no? It's okay if it was. No? Well done.

What makes it hard for a lot of people to read – and confusing – is that Job and his friends have good theology and bad theology. Meaning a lot of what you read in Job is right. You read it and you're like, "Yeah." But then a lot of it is not right. Did you notice that as you were reading through? You read one line or one paragraph and you're like, "Man, wow. That's really moving. That's really right. That feels right."

And then you read another line in another paragraph and you're like, "What the heck? That doesn't feel right to me at all."

And then a lot of it is in the middle. A lot of it is like general principles that are true and kind of a most of the time level, but not exactly for Job. For example, there's a famous line in chapter 5.

Job 5:17: **"Blessed is the one the Lord corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty. For he wounds, but he also binds up; he injures, but his hands also heal."**

Beautiful line. That's true. That's picked up later in Proverbs. It's also there. And then it's picked up by the New Testament writers. You see it all through the New Testament and Hebrews is a classic example. That's true. But, here's the thing: it was not true of Job. Job was not under God's discipline. Job was upright and blameless. Do you see that? So, it's true at a general principle level. But, that's not what this story's about. That's not what's going on at all.

So, do you see the ambiguity? Do you see that? Job is far too profound and complex to read in a black or white way. On scholar says this about the book:

"This book is far too subtle to paint everything in either/or terms."

You know, "It's all God or it's all Satan or whatever."

"It artfully paints a thoroughly ambiguous picture of the cosmos where those who are

basically in the wrong..." – Job's friends – "...sometimes speak right and those whose hearts are basically right..." – Job – "...nevertheless speak many untruths."

Hence why it's a bit hard to read. So, Job and his friends go at it and, towards the end, Job starts to demand that God show up. "God, come explain Yourself to me. You destroyed my life. What the heck? I'm blameless. I'm upright. Where are you in the cosmos? Come show up."

And then, finally, God does. Turn to chapter 38 all the way towards the end.

Job 38:1: **"Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm."**

So, God shows up, not as a therapist or a fun uncle, but as a hurricane. And you're hoping, as the reader, that God will finally after, you know, chapters and chapters of reading, answer the question "why?" Why do bad things happen to good people? Or at least you are expecting that God will tell Job the backstory. Like, "Oh, man. There's this whole thing you don't know anything about. This dude called the Satan..."

You were expecting at least that. But, instead, all that God does is ask questions.

Job 38:2: **"Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you and you shall answer me.**

"Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!"

This is sarcasm here.

"Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone—while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?"

And from here, God, who is quite sarcastic, at least in Job, starts to just go off with question after question after question. First, He asked Job questions about creation for two chapters. Questions about the ocean and the mountain range and space and the animal kingdom. I mean, He just goes off. And then, in chapters 40 and 41, He asks questions about two monsters, behemoth and leviathan. All sorts of debate and controversy about what exactly or who exactly behemoth and leviathan are. Some people think animals. Young earth creationists think dinosaurs or whatever. The vast majority of scholars all think they are ancient, mythological, symbolic creatures that stand for chaos and evil in the world.

So, what's going on here in four chapters of questions is that God is helping Job. God's actually quite kind here and gracious. God is helping Job see that one: the universe is incredibly complex. There's just all this stuff going on. And two: there are forces of evil at work that we don't see or know about, much less understand. There is a dangerous, wild freedom to the universe that we call home. And there is just a heck of a lot that is over our pay grade. That's really the point here.

And Job finally comes to realize this. Look at chapter 42. The very end of the book.

Job 42:1: **"Then Job replied to the Lord:**

"I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted."

Like, "You know what you're doing."

"You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand."

"I had no idea what I was talking about. What the heck?"

"Things too wonderful for me to know."

"This is way, way beyond me." Notice that Job does not want to debate or argue or fight with God anymore. He's just like, "Oh my gosh."

"You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.'"

But Job says, "No. I'm done."

"My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you."

How great of a line is that? Job never, in this story, ever sees behind the curtain of the universe. He never actually finds out what is going on. He never finds out about the Satan. He never finds out about any of that. He doesn't see, but he sees God, and that's enough. He sees God and then he's done. "I don't want to debate. I don't want to fight. You're enough."

"Therefore I despise myself..." – or, in a number of translations, I think a more likely way to phrase that, the word "myself" is not actually there in Hebrew. And a number of translations have it as "I despise the things I said." I think that's more likely here.

"I was off. A ton of what I said – not all of it, but a ton of what I said was wrong and I repent."

"I repent in dust and ashes."

Fascinating story. But then, look what happens:

"After the Lord has said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, 'I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken the truth about me,' – and then here's this bizarre line – "as my servant Job has."

What the heck? So, this is a burr in everybody's side here, because there's all sorts of debate and controversy and nobody really knows what's going on here. Because, for the most part, everybody would say – every scholar would say – "Yeah, Job said a whole bunch of stuff that was not right. A whole ton of stuff."

In fact, maybe even, depending on who you read, most of what he said was not right. But, here God says, "You have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has."

Now, the leading theory, most of the consensus, is that, based on the Hebrew word used here for "right" and the story overall is that what God is affirming isn't Job's theology, per se, although parts of it are right, but God is affirming Job's character. He's saying, "Job, you are blameless. You are upright."

And, listen, God is affirming Job wrestling with God in prayer. And that's the main takeaway here. God is affirming Job's wrestling with God in prayer. Notice that Job was racked by despair and by doubt and by anger, but it was all directed at God. Straight to God. It was not a Facebook rant. It was not an angry, ex-Christian blog post or whatever. It was none of that. It was all prayer. It was between Job and his God and his friends. And it was Job wrestling with God Himself. When he despaired, he despaired to God. When he doubted, he doubted to God. When he was angry, he started to just pound into the chest of God Himself. And God loved it. He loved it.

Even though Job's venting was on the edge of blasphemy at times, if not past the edge, it was brutally honest and God said, "Yes. That's it."

God is not nearly as scared of honesty as we are. And prayer is not a place to be good, it's a place to be honest. God is not a place to be good, but a place to be honest. Your relationship with God is a place where you are naked and open and exposed and everything is laid out on the table, and that is exactly how God wants to interact with you and with me. And if you keep reading the story, ironically it ends on an up note.

So, look at Job 42:10: "After Job had prayed for his friends, the Lord restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before."

Look at Job 42:12: "The Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the former part."

Look at Job 42:16: **"After this, Job lived a hundred and forty years; he saw his children and their children to the fourth generation. And so Job died, an old man and full of years."**

Now, before we wrap up, let's take a few minutes and kind of put all of this together as best we can. Three thoughts for you tonight. Here's the first one. You might not like this, but here we go.

First thought is there are no easy answers. The starting place for a conversation around the problem of evil, I think, in my humble opinion, is this: there are no easy answers. There is mystery at the heart of the universe. I'm shocked at the level of arrogant, dogmatic certainty that a lot of people claim to have about the way that the universe operates and the way that evil, in particular, operates in it.

Theodicy is one of the most complex, dense, tricky, unclear areas of theology in all of the Bible. It's an area of debate and controversy in the Church. There is a wide bandwidth of opinions in the global, historic Church about exactly how in control is God or not, how much freedom do we have or not, what about the role of Satan and all sorts of opinions. Next week, we'll lay out the options and I'll map out for you my theodicy, like how I read the Bible. But, heads up: every theodicy, every theory has holes. Right? I think mine has the least, but of course I think that. But, mine has holes for sure.

Anybody who claims to have all the answers is, at best, ignorant. There is a curtain that most of us never get to see behind. Job did not and neither do most of us. Three of the most important words to learn as a follower of Jesus, in my humble opinion, are "I don't know." We do not say this, I don't think, nearly enough. Why does a heroin addict give birth to 10 children, all of whom go into the foster care system and end up in your community or on the street while a Jesus-following wife, woman, desperately wants to be a mom, is there dealing with infertility? I don't know.

Why does a good, loving father accidentally back his SUV over his son? I do not know. Why was I born on the west coast of America and not in war-torn Syria to parents who love and follow Jesus and don't hate Jesus? I don't know.

Greg Boyd, there's a lot I love about his stuff and a lot I don't, but he writes this about the book of Job and I think it's really good:

"We are ignorant human beings living in a very mysterious, unfathomably complex creation that's torn apart in war. We have very little understanding about anything..." – I love that humility – "...and, if we forget all that we don't know, we'll start judging God for evil or judging other people. The whole point of the book of Job is this: if we remember our ignorance, we won't judge God as Job did or people as Job's friends did."

So, in times of suffering – some of you are in one tonight – there's just a lot that we don't know. The "why" question in particular is just, man, haunting. We just don't know. So, we cling to what we do know. There is a God in heaven, He's King over the earth. God is God, I'm not. He's a good, loving Father. He's with me. Jesus defeated death through His resurrection. One day I will follow in Jesus' footsteps and live into a brand new world set free from all evil, all injustice, all rape, all abuse, all depression, all anxiety, all mental illness. All of it gone; done. We know that.

So, when you don't know, a lot, then you cling to what you know. But, at the same time, we have to listen. We have to embrace mystery. We're really bad at that, in particular in the West and in particular in the Church. We have to live in the tension, ambiguity, unanswered questions, the "I don't know why." We have to embrace mystery, to feel comfortable in it, to settle into it, because there's a lot I don't know. So, I cling to what I do know because there's mystery.

So, first, there are no easy answers. Secondly, here's my next thought: there is a place for lament. You know, in the West, I would argue that we don't know how to grieve. At least not well. All sorts of reasons for that. Goes back to Greek stoicism and the medieval, Catholic, kind of weird theology of earning salvation through suffering and Hedonism and secularism and all sorts of reasons. But, long story short, somewhere along the way we forgot how to lament. Even in the Church. Think about the difference between the Psalms and modern worship music. Okay? Two thirds of the Psalms are lament. Have you read the Psalms? Two thirds. Two out of three are doubt, confusion, anger, anxiety, depression, despair, hate. I mean, it's all in there.

Almost none of our songs are. I asked Matt on Tuesday. You know, we were praying over the weekend. I said, "Hey, can we sing a few songs of lament."

And then Matt and I realized, "We don't have any."

And that's not a criticism of Matt at all. He's amazing. We don't have a single one. So, the Psalms: two out of three are songs of Lament. Bridgetown: zero. Not one. Like, we just don't have the "God, I feel miserable. I hate You. I don't even know if I believe in You."

Like, we just don't. That's not how we roll here at Bridgetown Church. You know what I mean? We've lost the art of lament. And, on top of that, it's like we don't know how to wrestle with God anymore. One scholar I read about Job said this:

"A truly religious attitude is not passive resignation to misfortune, but includes the courage to enter into dispute with God."

There is a place for dispute with God. There is a place to protest. There is a place to say, "God, I don't think You should do this. I think You should do this."

There is a place to argue and even, dare I say, fight with God. Now, most of the time you will lose. But, not always. Job lost. Have you read about Moses? God said yes to Moses. Have you read about Amos? God said yes to Amos. There is a place. And that's where we have to walk in the Holy Spirit and know when to surrender and submit and say, "God, Your will be done," and when to say, "God, no. This is not right. You need to change this. Please. I beg You."

We need to know. We need discernment to know the difference. But, there is a place. Even if you're wrong, even if you're off, there's a place for lament; a place for wrestling with God. Look at this cycle in the story of tragedy: tragedy strikes, his life is destroyed. Grief: "Tore my clothing. Shaved my head." Faith: "The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised." Then despair: "I'm miserable. I wish I was never born." Then doubt: "God, I don't think You're good. I think You're amoral. I think You're immoral. I think You're like a lion." Then anger: "God, how could You?"

Then the rebuke from God. Like: "Shut up and listen to me and let me question you." Then repentance: "I repent. I was wrong. I totally had no idea what I was saying." And then comfort: "My eyes have seen You. That's enough."

And God's healing over Job's life. You know, you see this cycle in Job's life – and I don't know about you, I see this cycle in my own. And you know, we need to run the whole course. I think what we want to do a lot of the time is skip right from the tragedy all the way down to comfort. Like, "Let's just skip all of that."

Like, really, really bad; comfort, comfort, comfort, comfort. It doesn't work that way. Or we get down to about "doubt" and then we bail. We have to keep at it. We have to work all the way through to come out the other side. We have to move through the whole gamut of emotions; good and bad; logical and illogical; good theology and bad theology. And we have to process all of that straight at God Himself. Not alone. Not on Facebook. But, straight into God in prayer.

Some of you are in that cycle tonight and you just need to keep going. Don't give up. Keep at it. And then, finally, here's my last thought and we'll be done: the invitation is to trust. The invitation is to trust. God doesn't answer the question "why?" Why do bad things happen to good people? I don't know. We'll talk about it a little bit next week. But, I don't really know. But, I'll talk for 45 minutes anyway. God doesn't unlock the puzzle of theodicy. In fact, instead of answering questions, He asks them. All to make the point the He's God and we're not God and we need to trust His wisdom. He knows what He's doing. And when I say He knows what He's doing, I don't mean that He's the cause of evil in the world. I don't mean that everything happens for a reason or some such nonsense. That's not what I mean.

What I mean is that He's God. He knows how to run the universe. He knows what He's doing and He's involved in your life. And trust His character. He is a good, loving Father. You're His daughter; you're His son. Trust that. But, this is hard to do. I was thinking about this a few days ago. Trust is one of the few things in life that most of us get worse at the older we get. Does that make sense? It's like reverse maturity. You know who knows how to

trust really well? Little kids. Three, four, five years old. They trust that mom and dad know best. Until about five and then it's all over.

We all, I think, would agree that a little kid should trust his parent if his parent is good. How much more should you and I trust God? But, at least for me, the scary thing about trust is that to trust God does not mean to believe that nothing bad will happen to you or even to believe that anything bad that does happen to you, you know, it's God's will or there's this divine blueprint or this secret plan for everything bad in your life or that it's actually good in disguise. No. It's not that. I don't think.

To trust is to believe that no matter what happens to you, no matter what, God is God. He's a good, loving Father. He's with you. You're not alone in your suffering. He knows what suffering is all about. He's at work to fight off evil in your life and your world. He has defeated it through His death and resurrection and is yet to implement it and we live in that time. And, even if you taste suffering now, this life is not all there is, my friends. No matter how hard it is. This life is not all there is. In the end, Jesus will lead you into a life that is absolutely free from all evil forever. So, trust Him. Trust Him.

I read the other day that trust is faith plus hope. It's faith: "I believe in God." And it's hope that God will work this out. He will lead and guide me forward and it will work out in the end.

So, tonight, I don't know where you're at. Some of you, I'm guessing you're at a great spot. It's Memorial Day weekend. You have the day off tomorrow. Eighty degrees. Fantastic. You don't need to feel all heavy or whatever. That's fine. But, my guess is that some of you are here tonight and you're in a rough spot. Maybe it's a major Job-like thing. Maybe it's not. Maybe it's minor or it's medium but you feel it, at least, emotionally. Maybe it's just the low-grade disappointment of life this side of resurrection. "This is just not what I thought it would be. Thirty-five and I'm single. In my job and it's this. In my family and it's this. Or my marriage and it's that."

And you just live with that kind of low-grade disappointment. I just want to, tonight, create space as we step into a time of worship. One: to just embrace mystery. There's just a lot we don't know and we're just going to worship God. God is God and we're not. And two: to just lament. This is a safe place. Even here in this gathering. Just to lament. Just to get everything off of your chest, good, bad and ugly, and to direct it straight to God. To process everything that you're feeling, good, bad and ugly, with your Father. And then, hopefully by the end of the night, to come to a place of trust.

"God, I don't get it. It doesn't all make sense. But, You're God and I trust You."

So, let's all stand together and I'm going to open it up for prayer in a minute. But first, let's just invite the Holy Spirit.