

## **FGBC: Sanctifying Suffering: I'm not as good or bad as I thought**

Job 32:1-37:24

July 29, 2018

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Please grab your Bible, or open the one on your phone, to the book of Job. If you are new with us today, we are in the third week of our five-week study through the Bible's best training manual for how to turn suffering into something awesome.

Now you don't need me to tell you this, but suffering is not awesome. Suffering was not God's plan for us, it is the result of living in a world corrupted by the devil and broken by sin. And so suffering comes from the enemy.

But as we've seen over the last two weeks that is only part of the story. Even though suffering was not God's original plan for us, it is something He plans to use now in order to accomplish His greatest good and ours. And this is what this books is about.

In Job a godly, but imperfect man, seemingly gets thrown under the bus by God. God recommends him to Satan as someone who can handle the worst he can throw at him. And so Satan does. He takes everything from Job – his wealth, his children and his health. And Satan is pretty sure that by doing this he will demonstrate that Job only loves God because God has given him stuff. But God bets this isn't true. And He wins the bet.

In one move God defeats Satan and increases His own glory and Job's godliness. Job's suffering didn't destroy him as Satan wagered, it drove him to his knees in worship.

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Now that's great for God, but perhaps that doesn't sit good with you. After all few people like to think of God using them to get something for Himself. We prefer a God who takes care of us because we are the most important thing in His world. But in Job God proves this isn't who He is. God centers His life around the only thing in the universe worthy of His focus – Himself.

And actually this is all over the Bible. So this last week in my devotions I came across a super well known, but difficult passage to understand. And as I dug into it I realized it is the same thing we get here.

So in Matthew 4 Jesus gets led by the Holy Spirit into the desert to be tempted by Satan. Just like Job the Spirit of God has trouble planned for Jesus. And after Jesus has fasted for 40 days and is at His weakest Satan approaches Him with three temptations. First, If You are really the Son of God then use Your power to benefit Yourself. Turn these rocks into bread.

Jesus says "No, My physical needs aren't the most important thing to Me, I am sustained by the very word of God."

Then Satan tries again, “If you are really the Son of God then throw Yourself off the temple and let God save You. And in the process impress the heck out of all these people. That’s what You want right Jesus? You want people to follow You. So do something worth following.”

But Jesus responds “I’m not going to put God to the test. I’m going to live My life His way, not the easy way.”

But it is the third temptation really stuck out to me, and that is because it seems so totally untempting.

So Satan comes to Jesus and says “Look out at all the kingdoms of the world, I will give all of this to You if you bow down and worship me.”

And we think “Really? Worship Satan? To get what? I mean doesn’t God own everything anyway, so what’s the temptation here? Satan is letting Jesus off with an easy one.

But this is no easy one. The temptation here is to put humanity first. Here is what Satan is saying to Jesus. “You’ve taken on a lot to love these people. You’ve given up heaven to come down here and become one of them. You really must love them. Well, if saving them is really that important to you then I’ll let you save them. You can accomplish Your mission this afternoon. All you’ve got to do is bow before me.

The temptation was for Jesus to put us first in His life. And if we were of first importance to Jesus then He would have taken this offer because He would have saved all humanity in that moment, and the end would justify the means. It certainly wouldn’t have been fun bowing before Satan – but neither was the cross – and if this sacrifice would mean He could fix things for His god – us, then it would be worth it.

But Jesus doesn’t buy it. He does love us, but He loves us second. He will sacrifice for us, but He won’t sacrifice what is of ultimate value. And so Jesus responds:

Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.’ (Matthew 4:10)

And we get this same thing in Job. God sacrifices Job’s comfort in order to accomplish two more important things. First, He accomplishes the increase of His infinite glory.

In that moment in heaven everyone watched as Job increased God’s glory by valuing Him as worthy of his worship. And now, thousands of years later, people are still reading this book and being inspired to value God more than they value their own lives. God’s renown and glory has increased.

But here's the amazing thing about God, and the second thing more important than Job's comfort. When Job decided to value God above his own life he ended up gaining something worth more than life. And that's because God has designed the universe such that our best is not comfort or safety, but Christlikeness. So by making God God in his life, Job entered a win/win situation. God won and he won. And so it turns out that Satan's plan was God's plan all along.

And the good news of this book is that God, in His sovereignty, is committed to doing the same thing in each of us. Friends, this is good news! God's not content with you where you are at right now. He's not going to leave you there. If He did, you would not increase His glory, and you would be stuck in a life of mediocrity instead of the best one He has for you.

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Now today the book of Job takes a surprise twist. A new voice enters the fray and its an unexpected one.<sup>1</sup>

So two weeks ago we were introduced to this upright and blameless man named Job who lost everything and yet said "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."<sup>2</sup>

And then for 30 chapters Job's three friends lambasted him with accusations about how God must be punishing him for some terrible hidden sin.

And this was hard for Job to bear. And he didn't do it perfectly. But he came through in the end with the hope that after his death, he would see his Redeemer stand on the earth and make everything right.

And that brings us to chapter 32 where a new name pops onto the scene. So look with me at Job 32 starting in verse 1.

[Read Job 32:1-5]

So it turns out Job didn't have three friends, there were four guys sitting in the dirt, tearing their clothes and mourning with him – three old guys and a young guy. And this young guy has been silent in respect for a long time.

He didn't just endure a week in the mud with a moper. He has endured months while Job and his three old friends commiserated. But now Elihu has had it. And he talks for 6 straight chapters without taking a breath.

But he isn't babbling, for the first time in Job something new is put on the table. And it is worth listening to. Elihu says Job's old friends are wrong, but Job isn't right either.

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<sup>1</sup> Outline from this point forward adapted from John Piper <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/job-rebuked-in-suffering>. Accessed July 27, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Job 1:21

Now not everyone agrees on how to read this section. Several commentaries think Elihu just continues the same bad theology. But there are a few reasons I don't agree.

So yes, Elihu does say some hard things. And he does repeat several things we covered in the previous 30 chapters. But we said last week that Job's friends weren't 100% wrong. Their contribution was a mixture of truth and error. And so it is okay for Elihu to repeat some stuff.

But the author presents Elihu differently than the other guys. So Elihu's argument is aimed at Job and his three friends equally – that's new. And it goes on for 6 chapters which is longer than any other speech in Job – even God's which we are going to get at next week. And then at the end of his speech Elihu asks Job to respond, but Job doesn't. He says:

Listen to my words, Job;  
pay attention to what I have to say....  
Answer me, if you can;  
make your case and take your stand. (Job 33:1;5)

But Job doesn't respond. And that's new. Remember last week the conversation went Eliphaz, then Job, then Bildad, then Job, then Zophar then Job. And Job got the last word showing that he had defeated their attack on his character. But here the author is saying Elihu wins this round.

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The final reason I think Elihu is different is that when God speaks, which we will get to next week, He tears apart Job's friends while also outlining Job's failing, but He has nothing bad to say about Elihu.

So, while Elihu does say some difficult things, what he's got to say is worth listening to. So here we go. First, Elihu tells Job and his friends why they are wrong.

Now I'm not going to get into the details too much because I want to get to what Elihu adds. But basically he agrees with Job's defense that God isn't punishing him. The righteous do suffer, but their suffering isn't punishment. So Job's friends are wrong.

But Job is wrong too. Job is blameless and upright, but he isn't sinless. And so here Elihu exposes a root of pride that is festering in Job. Job is proud of his righteousness and Elihu points out how he has over spoken. So in chapter 13 Job says:

O God... summon me, and I will answer!  
Or let me speak to You, and You reply.  
Tell me, what have I done wrong?  
Show me my rebellion and my sin.  
Why do You turn away from me?  
Why do you treat me as Your enemy? (Job 13:20-24)

But Elihu says "you can't justify yourself at God's expense. It doesn't work that way. You need to humble yourself and accept what you don't understand."

And he goes on to outline that God brings suffering into our lives to expose things like pride that hide deep down inside us. He says:

For God speaks again and again,  
 though people do not recognize it....  
 He whispers in their ears  
 and terrifies them with warnings.  
 He makes them turn from doing wrong;  
 he keeps them from pride....  
 God disciplines people with pain on their sickbeds,  
 with ceaseless aching in their bones. (Job 33:14-19)

So Elihu says God doesn't punish His children like a soldier flogging a criminal, He cuts them like a surgeon removing cancer. God uses suffering to turn His children away from sin that would destroy them.

And as Job hears Elihu's rebuke he humbles himself and prepares to repent – we will get to that – but next Elihu brings something to the table that Job hadn't imagined possible. And what he says is exactly what we need to hear today.

So in the Bible we hear lots about the wicked and the righteous. For example Psalm 1 says:

Blessed is the [righteous]  
 who does not walk in step with the wicked  
 or stand in the way that sinners take  
 or sit in the company of mockers...  
 Not so the wicked!  
 They are like chaff...  
 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
 nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.  
 For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,  
 but the way of the wicked leads to destruction. (Psalm 1)

And when we read black and white stuff like this we don't know what to do with it. Like I'm not wicked, but I'm a bit nervous to just slap the "righteous" badge on my chest either. How about you? Are you sporting that badge? If you are, are you wearing it like Job – self-righteously, or the right way? This is tricky.

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But here Elihu is very helpful. So he says following God isn't black and white, it's gray. So righteousness isn't about being sinless, it is about being committed to having sin rooted out of your life. And this is the kind of person Job is. He is blameless and upright, which means he is a righteous sinner. And Elihu brings this out.

So in chapter 36 Elihu says:

[God] never takes His eyes off the innocent...  
 If they are bound in chains  
 and caught up in a web of trouble,  
 He shows them the reason.  
 He shows them their sins of pride.  
 He gets their attention  
 and commands that they turn from evil. (Job 36:7-10)

So Elihu says sometimes bad things happen to innocent or righteous people. Sometimes they get bound with chains, sometimes they get caught in trouble. And God uses these sufferings to reveal their sin to them.

God loves righteous people – He never takes His eyes off them. And so He disciplines them to free them from their sin. And this is what happened to David, one of the big righteous sinners in the Bible. In Psalm 119 he says:

My suffering was good for me,  
 for it taught me to pay attention to Your decrees. (Psalm 119:71)

Now friend, here is why we need to hear this. If you love Jesus and want to live your life for His glory you are righteous. And that's in spite of the fact that you know you aren't perfect. Righteousness is not perfection.

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Now hear this, for years I lived under the self-condemning belief that in order to be righteous I had to make sure I was sinless. And of course I could only ever manage that for a very brief period of time, and so I lived in this cycle of sin and then self-condemnation followed by striving to be good followed by a self-righteous attitude not that unlike Job's, followed by growing apathy, followed by more sin and more self-condemnation. That's the crazy train!

But that's not the life God wants for His children. God's message is that if you belong to Him then your sin has been covered by Jesus' blood. Righteousness then isn't a matter of perfect behaviour, it is a matter of having the right Saviour.

Jesus took the punishment you deserve, and so there is no more punishment left for you. That means God sees you as righteous, and He isn't wrong! So stop telling God you aren't righteous. Stop calling Him a liar. Instead embrace the grace that He has poured out for you through the blood of Jesus. You are righteous.

That's one side of it, here is the other: If you are God's child then you want to live your life in a way that pleases Him – not to earn His grace, but because you have received it. If you don't want this then you aren't one of God's children. And so embrace the opportunity to turn away from the obvious sin in your life. You know what that is. Maybe it is lust, maybe it is anger, maybe it is jealousy or greed. It's the part of you that you know doesn't look like Jesus. Turn away from that.

But also know this, even as you turn from that you are still a sinner. There is sin in you below your obvious sin. And if you love Jesus, then Jesus is not okay with leaving you defeated by sin. He's going to root it out so you can love Him better.

Friend, God is going to do this in you because He is committed to making you into someone who can increase His glory and live the life He designed you to live in the beginning. God knows everyone who looks like Jesus wins, and He wants this for you. But nobody looks like Jesus without suffering.

So brothers and sisters, do not fear your cross. Jesus didn't. He endured it for the joy set before Him. And He wants this joy for you as well. So suffering can be turned into something awesome.

Peter, a man who knew suffering and loved Jesus, said:

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. (1 Peter 1:6-7 NIV)

And James, a man who was beaten to death for worshipping his older brother Jesus, said:

Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing. (James 1:2-4)

My suffering friends, He loves you. Jesus loves you.