

# Sermon Text for October 24, 2021

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*II Corinthians 12:6-10, Job 1:13-22*

*“The story of Job”*

On Thursday evening I drove into New York City and met my brother closest in age to me and we went and saw another brother of ours who was in an off Broadway play called the Story of Homeless Joe. It sounds like one of my sermons, although homeless Joe isn't a Bible story, it is a story that is found everywhere throughout the Bible. It is about a reporter who is looking for a story and finds herself on the street in New York among the community of the homeless and everyone is telling her about this homeless guy named Joe who had the most tragic story of all, and yet somehow managed to be filled with joy.

She runs across all of these different homeless characters, one of them played by my brother was a Vietnam War Vet. When she meets Joe he lost his mom and dad and siblings in a house fire when he was 13. Then when he grew up and was married he lost his wife and infant son in a car accident. What kept him going was knowing that one day there would be a happy reunion in heaven with all of them together. Joe was able to focus on the promise of seeing his loved ones which gave him unmitigated joy.

It was fitting for me as I prepared for the story of Job today to hear of another Job, and actually a whole crew of Jobs which filled the play. And then the real life events of my brother and his battles and how far he had come and to see him absolutely beaming and full of joy after the play. He was awesome, by the way, I hope he's listening, he normally does. Everyone wave and say hi Timmy. The play and the story that we have before us in the bible demands that we answer the question, how do we behave when we suffer. Some would say how do we behave when we don't get what we want, but it goes much deeper than that, how does our view of life, of those around us, of God, change when we suffer and when we face hardships?

Both of our Scriptures today point to a God who is the primary player in all things life. That should not surprise us, to say that God is in charge of all things. That's pretty normal to hear. But suffering? I think I tend to teach, which isn't completely accurate, that God finds a way to bring good out of suffering and I tend to lean away from God as being the source or the enactor of our suffering. So what is God's role in suffering? The answer might surprise us, at least the answer that we find in both Paul's second letter to the Corinthians and Job's answer to that question. It forces us to look at our response to God's role.

## READ

Over history there have been sacrilegious answers given to what is the thorn in the side that we hear Paul describe in II Corinthians. The more tame answers are blindness, a malady that weakens, him, a temptation that is not described in Scripture. The bottom line is that we don't know at all what the thorn in the flesh is. But we exactly what purpose this thorn serves because Paul tells us specifically what purpose this suffering, this thorn serves in Paul's life. Wouldn't it be nice if we knew exactly why we were suffering in different seasons and stages of our lives? Oh, I see why my health is so poor, it is so that I can learn this lesson, and then we learn this lesson and our health improves. That's not the way it works, but it does for Paul.

You see Paul knows that he has a special place in God's heart because God has worked in his life in a powerful way. He calls it in vs.7 exceptional revelations that God has given him. We know the work of Paul, it is not insignificant. Paul states that the reason why he was given this thorn in the flesh in order that it would torment him and prevent him from being too proud of his status or of his abilities in God. It served the purpose of keeping him humble and it kept him humble by tormenting him.

As a result of this tormenting suffering he was able to clearly hear God's voice in his life which told him in vs.9: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." Paul is grateful for his suffering in his life because it reminds him that it is not by might, not by power, but by the Spirit of God that anything is able to be accomplished. It is not through us, but through God. There are many other places where Paul rejoices in his sufferings because it teaches him something about himself and about how God works in this world. But the part that might be challenging to many of us, and which Job repeats, is that this thorn is provided to him by God. Who gave Paul this thorn in this side, this torment, I'm going to say the Lord, and if not, at least, God is able and chooses to use it for God's purposes.

That is probably not a message you have heard from me before. James tells us in 1:13-15, and we learned this before, do not say that God tempts me, for God does not tempt. But temptation is not suffering, temptation is our desire to sin. Let's look at Job's life and this section of the story where we see that he suffers tremendously, and yet if there were anyone who walked this earth besides our Savior Jesus Christ, who lived a righteous life, it would have been Job. God says so in vs.8, he calls him: there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He wasn't tempted, in fact, he loved God so much that he gave even extra sacrifices to the Lord just in case his children needed something

extra to be covered as well because you never know what your kids are doing when they are out of the house.

It is this stability within his family and it is devotion to God that puts Job on Satan's map. He draws attention of the devil, as those who follow God's path will likely draw the attention of Satan. If you don't feel like you are battling here on earth to do God's will, then you probably aren't. Satan doesn't really care much about you. Job has everything he could ever want. House, family, more material things in life than you could imagine, and he was generous, he wasn't a miser. But then the calamities begin to strike him, one after another. They come in such a way that he doesn't, and the reader doesn't have time to react to them individually.

They come in such a way, the Sabeans, the fire, the Chaldeans, the wind, that forces Job to react to all of them at once. Job had everything, and in a succession of four messages, he is left with nothing, except a wife who later tells him to curse God and die. None of these take place because of Job's sin. That is an important aspect to this. If we can point to a reason for our suffering, like the thorn in the flesh to keep us humble, well, that is one thing. But if like Job the sufferings come and we have no indication as to why they are coming, well, that's a different story.

More likely than not it forces us to ask that question. Why do we love God? Do we love God because he has shown his favor to us? Do we love God because He is generous to us? Do we love God because he answers our prayers? What if tragedy strikes time, after time, after time, what can our response be? Let's look at Job. The first thing he does is grieve. Job's reaction is to grieve. There is nothing wrong in grieving. Yes, we believe in the resurrection, but God tells us that there is a time for mourning, and so we ought to mourn. But then look at what ends his mourning in vs. 20. He worships God.

That worship then leads to a series of admissions that we would do well to remember in the midst of our suffering. We are completely helpless in the hands of God. Naked I came into this world, and naked I return. God gives and God takes. This is a recognition of the providence of God. He doesn't say God has given and the Sabeans, the Chaldeans, the lightning or fire, and the wind have taken, or Satan has taken. Job recognizes here that ultimately God is solely responsible for both the giving and the taking. Anything less creates a reactionary and weak God, always on his toes trying to keep up with us and our fickle whims.

Somehow, somehow, Job blesses the same God who is afflicting him at this time. Can we do the same? Are we able to do the same? No more sudden or catastrophic suffering could be imagined than what Job went through. How should a human being respond? Exactly like

Job. Without recrimination, self-pity, but with a praise to the Lord of his being. Job is unarguably here set forth as an exemplar of faith in crisis.

Now, there is no doubt that Job's behavior is right and we should use it as an example. But is it possible? That is a question that only we can answer when we are faced with tragedy, when we are faced with situations that shock us and rock us to our core. When we are faced with those realities then we can truly know if, like Job, we are able to worship God, and say, in the face of disaster, The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh, blessed be the name of the Lord. Amen.