

## **“Disciples Live by Faith” – Job 19:23-27a – November 10, 2019**

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The story of Job is an odd one. Job is a righteous man, that is, he lives his life in a right way. He follows God’s laws to the letter, and if you were to pick apart the pieces of his life, you would find nothing amiss. Even God proclaims that Job is blameless. Job is the poster child for righteous living.

So the story goes, that one day the Accuser came to God, and they were talking about Job. The Accuser scoffed, saying, “Well, why wouldn’t Job be righteous? You’ve kept him safe, protected. He’s well off. Big family, good health, lots of crops and herds, plenty of wealth. It’s easy to be righteous when everything is going your way. I’ll bet his faith crumbles under the weight of adversity.” And God took that bet.

So, after a series of devastating events, Job’s assets were depleted and his family destroyed, but Job remained faithful. Then Job’s health went south, and he was plagued with numerous diseases, until there was nothing left but the barest shell of a man. And still his faith in God remained.

His wife told him to curse God and abandon his faith for these horrible events. Job’s friends were convinced he had sinned greatly against God to have been cursed so. They repeatedly told him to repent and beg God for forgiveness. But Job had never faltered in his righteousness. And he argued with his wife and his friends, affirming his innocence and holding onto his faith.

And as this story plays out, Job cries out to God, angry and confused. Job rants and questions how God could be so cruel, and he demands answers from God. He wails his protests and laments his afflictions. But God remains silent.

So, his wife and his friends have at him again. “See?” said his wife, “God doesn’t care about you. Curse God, and be done with God!” Jobs friends continue to call him unrighteousness and stubborn. Telling him that his pride is keeping him from seeing his multitude of faults. He must repent of his sins. But Job remains righteous, and he will not curse God.

Job continues his questioning of God. Even accuses God, daring to put God on trial for how God has allowed this torture and torment to continue. “Why, oh God, have you abandoned me?! Where are you? Show yourself! Explain to me why my life is in ruins! How could you treat me this way? I’ve never turned away from you! I have followed you all my life, and done everything you ever expected of me and more! Why would you let these horrible things happen to me!?”

Why, God? Why!?

Have we not uttered those same words at God? In the hospital waiting room. When the police officer arrives at the door with devastating news. When storms destroy a lifetime of memories. You know the scenarios. You or someone you love have been there.

And yet God is silent.

Job berates God. Job accuses God. Job begs God. Job lashes out at God. Job holds onto his faith in God. Even in his darkest moments, Job can affirm – I know that my Redeemer lives. Even while God remains silent.

And that is the ambiguity in which we live. Sometimes God remains silent. Sometimes there are no answers. Sometimes all that is left is our faith. And sometimes that has to be enough.

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So, I probably should end the message right here. Because that's it. Sometimes faith has to be enough. I wish I could give you an easy answer, a quick response, a soothing quote. You might even say, "toss us a platitude to tide us over." I wanted to look up the word platitude – for curiosity's sake – so I went to Wikipedia, the internet's source of knowledge, and found this statement, "A **platitude** is a trite, meaningless, or prosaic statement, often used as a [thought-terminating cliché](#), aimed at quelling social, emotional, or cognitive unease." ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Platitude#cite\\_note-robinson-1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Platitude#cite_note-robinson-1))

But that's just it. No platitudes. We have to learn to live with that unease. I think that's part of what faith is. Not looking for the easy answers and being willing to wrestle with the hard questions.

The book of Job is part of the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament – like Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. These are the books of the bible that wrestle with the hard questions. And in the case of Job, the question relates to the existence of suffering. Remember, as illustrated by the speeches of Job's friends throughout the book, Jews believed that suffering was punishment for sin. The more you sinned, the more you suffered. But clearly that is not the case, because suffering can happen to anyone at any time, even a righteous man like Job.

And so we wrestle with this idea of suffering – why does it exist, why can it affect us in so many ways, why do some people suffer more than others, why isn't life fair, why does God allow suffering to happen, how do we respond to suffering. Obviously, it is a complex issue, one that humanity has been wrestling with throughout our existence. So, if you hoped that I would give you an answer today, you are clearly not going to get one.

But I do think this story tells us something we may not have realized – that it is okay to question. It is okay to doubt. It is okay to be angry at God. So many people believe that it is

wrong to be mad at God. And so instead of expressing our intense feelings, instead of lashing out in anger over the unfairness of tragic suffering, we hold it in. We berate ourselves for feeling anger at God, and we add guilt onto the suffering. But being angry is not the same as turning away from God or giving up our faith in God. Job held onto his faith in the midst of his anger.

Elie Wiesel was a survivor of the Holocaust. At the age of 14, he and his family were taken to a Nazi concentration camp and experienced tremendous horrors. Wiesel gave a television interview where he recalled an experience at the concentration camp. A group of men in his barracks decided to have a trial. They wanted to try God for the horrors of the Holocaust. They had been men of faith, but they felt that God had abandoned them. They decided to put God on trial for neglecting the Jewish people. Young Wiesel was asked to witness the proceedings. The charges against God were brought forward – God’s people had been torn from their homes, separated from their families, beaten, abused, murdered, and burned in incinerators. A defense was attempted. But in the end, the men found God guilty of abandoning the people, maybe even guilty of not existing.

When the trial was concluded, a profound silence descended upon the room of men. A few minutes later the men realized it was time for the sacred ritual of evening prayer. At this point in the story, Wiesel recounted a remarkable fact. These men who had just found God guilty of abandoning them – these same men began to worship God in their evening prayer. (*A Preacher’s Guide to Lectionary Sermon Series*, Martin Thielen, p. 250)