

# THE BOOK OF JOB

## 2. “Job Curses His Life”

Job 3:1-10, 4:1-9, 7:11-21

**PENTECOST 7**

**July 8, 2018**

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On the morning of the Fourth of July, I began my day by reading the “*Declaration of Independence*,” which sets forth the American colonists’ reasons to separate from Great Britain’s tyranny, and their aspirations for a new nation, conceived in liberty and the rights endowed by their Creator.

Upon turning on my computer and going online, I saw a link to an article about some fringe group dismissing the “*Declaration*” as a form of hate speech.

Later that same morning, we received a phone call from the daughter of my lifelong friend, John, saying that he was hospitalized and wanted me to come and see him.

Before leaving on vacation last month, I touched base with John to see how his new experimental treatment for pancreatic cancer was working.

For just over a year, John had been receiving treatments for this dreadful cancer, which was discovered when he underwent tests for kidney stones.

Needless to say, John’s life had been turned upside down, and yet, with almost no complaints, he kept up both his treatments and his faith.

That day, John said he felt so good that he went out and mowed his lawn with his prized Kubota rider mower.

As we concluded our phone conversation, John wished us a good vacation, and commented on how he couldn’t wait for September,

when he and his family would be renting the same place we were headed to in Maine, on the water, facing Rockland Harbor and the islands leading out to the ocean.

For years, John's family and ours had vacationed together.

John loved the peaceful calm this seaside oasis gave to him.

Upon viewing an extremely beautiful sunrise, I sent a picture of it to

John for him to dwell upon and look forward to the days ahead.

I truly had hoped John would be able to make the trip and to see his own sunrises.

However, upon arriving at Bryn Mawr Hospital late on the afternoon of

July fourth, we were taken aback by John's tremendous loss of weight and his almost skeletal appearance.

He was beginning to look like a Holocaust survivor.

His wife, Barbara, informed us that John had not slept since arriving at the hospital the previous Saturday.

All John could repeat was his wish to go home, where he could get some peace and quiet.

When everyone had left the room to take a break, I was alone with John.

He said, "Jeff, I'm done.

All I want to do is just fall asleep and die a peaceful death."

After finally falling asleep for ten short minutes, John awoke again in his agitated state, expressing his desire to go home.

This morning, in our second of six texts from the Book of Job, we meet another agitated man who, after learning of the deaths of his seven sons and three daughters, remains silent for seven days, not having sinned with his lips, but apparently displaying signs of ever deepening agony.

Now Job opens his mouth and curses the day of his birth:

- that day through which one is introduced to this life and the goodness of all creation,
- that day of annual remembrance and celebration, which renews one's participation in the goodness of created life,
- that day through which a now cursed Job perceives it as being given entry into the bitterness of soul and a new sense of the enmity Of God (the name, Job, can be translated in Hebrew as "one whom God treated as an enemy").

In last week's introduction to this summer series of sermons on the Book of Job, we learned that this Book is composed of two completely different sections.

The Fable of Job forms the Prologue (Chapters 1 and 2) and the Epilogue (Chapter 42).

The Poem of Job, which comprises the intervening 39 chapters, has spoken dialogues between Job and his friends, and the final monologue delivered by God.

The Fable, with which we are most familiar, presents Job as a pious, righteous, and obedient man, who is blessed with a large family and riches beyond imagination.

The Fable tells us that one day, God and Satan entertain a wager to see whether or not upright Job would remain faithful if his blessings were taken away from him.

Following the losses of his material wealth and his children, we are told ***“despite all that, Job did not sin nor did he cast reproach on God”*** (1:22).

The Fable concludes with Chapter 42, as the venerable, pious, still faithful Job has everything restored to him.

Today, with our readings from Chapters 3, 4, and 7, the Book of Job begins to become the most challenging book to understand in all of the Bible.

The Poem of Job is one of the most sublime creations in all of Biblical literature.

Sir Alfred Lord Tennyson, who knew something about poetry, called it “the greatest poem of ancient and modern times.”

The Poem of Job asks difficult questions:

Do we really live in a world that rewards people for being honest and charitable?

If so, how are they rewarded?

Does God really care about the kind of person I am?

Can a religious person be angry at God, even doubt God's existence, and still think of him or herself as a religious person?

The Poem of Job does not have answers to those questions, but it does have answers.

It invites us to look at the world through the eyes of several characters:  
some who challenge God  
some who try to defend God, and ultimately,  
from God, Himself.

The author of the Poem totally leaves the Fable behind.

There are no more references to God's wager with Satan.

There is no need to justify a God who kills innocent people in order to win a bet.

Instead, there is a no-holds-barred argument about God's role in the world, the likes of which we find nowhere else in the Bible.

While scholars cannot concur on the date of the Poem's origin, they at least can agree that Chapter Three marks the place where the Book of Job shifts from prose to poetry.

Job loses his patience and becomes angry.

He ends his silence to speak at length.

Then Eliphaz appears as the first of three friends who have come to comfort Job in his misery.

After that, Job receives Bildad, then Zophar, ending the first cycle of dialogues.

The Poem follows with a second cycle, with tempers growing steadily shorter, and with Job offering rejoinders with each of the friend's remarks.

A third cycle ensues and degenerates into total confusion, with the participants losing patience with each other, shouting and interrupting one another, setting the stage for the unforgettable monologue from God, concluding the Poem.

Returning now to our text, after a seven day period of strict silence, Job releases his pent-up emotions, cursing the day he was born (3:1-10).

Job does not directly curse God, as the adversary, Satan, had predicted.

However, his turgid, bombastic language gives evidence that Job feels that the whole created order of the world has come apart.

Job then turns from cursing to questioning, using a series of rhetorical questions that all of his friends will seek to answer.

His key word throughout this section will be **"WHY."**

Job concludes his initial lament with four rhetorical knife-like stabs, expressing his pain and frustration.

Like my friend, John, Job verbalizes:

“I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, only turmoil!”

Only when Yahweh reappears in Chapter 38 with His own set of questions will Job find the peace that eludes him.

Beloved people of God,

Job’s initial speech, cursing the day he was born, is startling in its intensity.

For that reason, it can be troubling to those who read the Book of Job.

And yet, we need to be aware that strong emotions and incisive questions fit into a life of faith.

Viewed from within the larger context of the entire Book of Job, and even, for that matter, the entire Bible, Job raises key questions which all of us have come to ask at one time or another in our lives.

Overall, the Job we meet in the Poem articulates his most troubling thoughts and deepest pains, so that he can seek to understand his adversity in light of his commitment to God, as Jesus later did prior to and during His crucifixion.

Job does not deny or dilute the pain he feels, but rather expresses it honestly.

Job does not address his lament to God, but his candid recognition of his pain is a necessary first step in the direction of faith.

As Job will come to realize, feeling deeply and speaking from pain are not inherently sinful.

Just as parents understand, when their children are speaking out of frustration and hurt, they want their children to turn to them at these difficult times, so God desires that we be just as open and honest with Him.

We do not have to wait until we have calmed down and gotten things under control before we can speak to God.

Like Job, we need to remember that our understanding of God is limited, and we need to learn that we will never be able to comprehend all that God is doing in our lives.

**AMEN**

