

**Why does God allow Evil and Suffering?
Job 2:1-10, Job 42:1-10**

Friends, when our lives are going well, it's very easy to believe in God isn't it? It's very easy to feel love for Him, it's very easy to feel like we can trust Him. And... we don't need to work too hard to find the motivation to come and worship Him.

But that can all change rather quickly when tragedy comes into our lives or into the lives of others around us, when we witness disaster and devastation in the world around us, when we come face to face with evil and watch it succeed.

And looking back over the past year or so there has been much tragedy and disaster that we've been made aware of.

In 2008 the Global Economy almost collapsed and as a result across the world people lost their jobs and the means to provide for their families.

In the USA many people have lost their homes because they don't have a job and unemployment still continues at record high levels.

There have been devastating earthquakes in Argentina and New Zealand and a tsunami that has crippled Japan.

In Canada this spring has seen continuous flooding in Manitoba and Saskatchewan and near Montreal, and to the south we've watched tornados ravage the Midwest.

And closer to home, the town of Slave Lake AB was half destroyed by a forest fire.

And when you take a moment to think that these are more than just breaking news headlines – that each of these tragedies contain the stories of thousands of people who have lost everything they've worked so hard for... people who have had their lives destroyed, people who have loved ones taken from them...

And maybe you also know of some tragedy that didn't make headline news. A friend whose son was killed in a work related accident, a family who was torn apart by divorce, a co-worker who discovers they have a terminal disease, a neighbor

whose expectation for their new baby is shattered when the baby is born deformed.

When we are faced with all these stories, it makes us feel vulnerable, small, and threatened perhaps? You begin to realize how easy it would be for your life to be destroyed.

And so we reach for some back-up, some assurance – something to make us feel safe and secure and fairly confident that such tragedy would not happen to us.

We say – we live in Canada, it's a peaceful nation...our economy was better protected by our governmental controls, we live in Calgary, no earthquake zone here, and we have oil...everyone needs oil so we'll still have work...

And perhaps we also say... we have God. We have God who is in control of everything and he can protect us from harm and danger and disaster....we'll trust God to look out for us!

And for a few seconds we feel reassured and secured but then we think – my neighbor who just gave birth to a deformed child... she was trusting God.

And there were churches that were destroyed in the Midwest when the tornados ripped through.

And I'm certain that many of the families in the US who lost their jobs and houses were praying to God to give them work just so they can provide for their families and stay off the street...

And suddenly our security and assurance dissolves underneath us like quicksand and we sink into doubt and a crisis of faith.

We begin to question. “What good is it to believe in God if He does not shelter us from the disasters and tragedies which threaten us?”

Why does God allow this to happen to people? Why does God allow evil and suffering to prevail? Why did He create a world where such things were possible?

And when our crisis of faith forces us to ask these questions, the answers we come up with can take us in a number of different directions.

We may conclude that there is no benefit to trusting in God and following Him if He doesn't pull through for us when it really seems to matter.

Or we might try to make sense of it all in some way so that what we know about God and what we go through in life fit together.

So we might figure that God really would like to prevent all the evil and suffering from happening – after all He is good, so something must be preventing him from doing it like;

He has to allow human free will to operate and so we live with the consequences, or He isn't all-powerful after all, or maybe God doesn't exist, since a good God would never allow all this to occur, so He must not be there.

Friends, trying to deal with the anxiety or loss that we feel through rationalizing some answers to these questions doesn't lead us anywhere good.

But the scripture tells us a story that can be of some help when we are struggling to deal with the feelings of insecurity and anxiety, or loss and pain when we are faced with evil and suffering.

So let me tell you about this story. It's a story you may be familiar with about a man named Job. Job was a good person – kind to all, careful to honor God, in fact the scripture says he was “blameless and upright, He feared God and shunned evil” He was also extremely wealthy – He was considered to be the greatest man in the land where he lived.

Like I said when we started out, it's easy to love and serve God when life is going well for you isn't it.

And this is precisely what Satan says to God about Job when God boasts about Job in the heavenly court, and so God – confident in the authenticity and genuineness of Job's love and

obedience, gives Satan permission to ruin Job in order to prove Satan wrong, because Satan believes Job only serves God out of self-interest.

So Satan causes disasters to befall Job which kill all of his children, steal away his wealth, and destroys his health, and... causes his wife too nag him in the midst of all of this! And Job has no idea why this has all happened to Him.

But Job stubbornly persists in clinging to his relationship with God. He does not abandon God when for all intents and purposes it feels like God has abandoned him. So Satan is proved wrong.

Friends, evil and suffering test our feelings of loyalty to God. How do we know that our loyalty and love for God is nothing more than fair-weather friendship? As Job says “shall we accept good from God and not trouble?”

When we face disaster, suffering and evil in our lives it reveals to us the authenticity of our feelings about God. Is it just something we feel or is it real? Suffering reveals it.

Now, friends – It was not an easy experience for Job to stay loyal to God while he was suffering all these things. Having your feelings of loyalty authenticated is miserable – and even if you know that this is what is happening, it doesn’t make it easier to undergo.

And often you don’t know it – Job didn’t, and when these calamities happened to Job there was an added layer of torment.

In addition to enduring the loss of his children, wealth and health, he also had to endure God’s apparent absence during it all! Not so much as even a get well card from the Almighty for Job.

Friends, when the storms of life blow – the pain can be bearable because you have a sense of God’s presence and that gives you peace. God is our rock, our help in times of trouble right?

And friends, even when we are suffering because we are reaping the consequences for some thing we did wrong and

God is disciplining us, there's still a measure of peace because we know we are in God's hands.

But suffering disaster, and having God be absent during it all...feeling like He's abandoned us during it - well it is a wonder that Job stayed loyal to God through it all.

And when we observe the evil and suffering rampant in our world you wonder where God is, it looks like He's absent, like He's abandoned us.

When I watch reports of how sheriffs have to go around evicting people from their homes and I'm certain these people have prayed for a miracle – I ask “where is the God that I stand up and preach about every Sunday, the God who loves us, who acts for us, who saves us! Where is he?”

Friends, I think much of the suffering and evil in the world looks like this to us. We can't see anything good coming out of it, and we can't see God doing anything in it – it seems pointless and senseless to us.

It's at this point that the “why and where” question can lead us to look for answers which may be right but still feel wrong to us.

Now Job's friends witness his awful suffering too, just as we see suffering in the world around us. And they try to make sense of this calamity that has befallen him, just as we try to figure out the “why and where” question as well.

So eventually they speak to Job about his suffering, from what they know to be true of God they are convinced that Job is hiding some secret sin that God is punishing him for.

That's true – God does use consequences to teach us what is right. Psalm 62:12 “*You reward everyone according to what they have done.*” You reap what you sow.

Job is suffering, so he must have done something, so confess the sin and end the suffering, and God will appear once again.

Now Job would gladly do this, in fact he believes what his friends believe, but He can't figure out what He's done wrong.

And remember, Job has a close relationship with God – so if Job has done something unaware, God should show up and tell him what it is, Job cannot admit to false guilt or confess something he isn't aware of.

Now, we know Job is not guilty, we know he is suffering because he is associated with God, because he's loyal to God and for this reason God must be absent so that his loyalty can be proved authentic, but his friends don't know this.

And instead of helping him make sense out of what appears to be meaningless suffering and God's absence, Job's friends are adding insult to injury by applying correct theology to a situation which is beyond their understanding.

So friends, what the scripture teaches us from this is that our response to witnessing, and experiencing the suffering and evil in this world is not to try and make sense out of it – even if we know correct things about God and who He is, because even correct facts about God can be wrong if we don't know the context.

We'll end up concluding something wrong, like God's not in control, God's not powerful enough, or God isn't good or God doesn't exist.

All we can do in the face of meaningless suffering and evil is to stay fiercely loyal to God – to trust in Him when everything around us, and maybe even in us, is screaming to give up.

Because friends, while God does not give us the answers to make sense of, or explain evil and suffering, He has revealed the context in which they occur in the scriptures.

In Job's story we see there was a bet going on about Job's loyalty, in the story of the scripture we see that a perfectly good and harmonious creation is ruptured by evil, and instead of simply abandoning it, or wiping it out and giving up on it, God puts into effect a plan to rid His creation of evil and restore it and renew it.

And it's within this context that we must understand suffering and evil, and when we witness or experience it our response must be to go back and remember the context.

That is what will help us to stay fiercely loyal to God and hang on in spite of whatever evil we may face or tragedy we may suffer.

And this context, this story of scriptures is so neatly summarized in that famous verse – John 3:16 *“For God so loved the creation that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

Because when evil and suffering entered into God’s good creation so long ago, and God was fully aware of all the horrible implications it would mean for everyone – he knew it would mean genocide, starvation, disease, divorce, death...

God did not wipe everything out and abandon creation as a bad idea. God loved the creation, God wanted you and I to come into existence – to be born, to know us, to watch us grow and experience us living the life He gave us – in spite of the fact we are affected by evil through our sin.

So He put into effect a plan to save the creation, to save us – he gave his one and only Son, Jesus Christ.

And Jesus entered into this world, he became one of us – and lived in the midst of all the suffering, and evil, and he engaged it. He didn’t offer explanations for it, He didn’t explain it away

In fact when He was pressed for an explanation in one situation by his disciples about why a man was born blind he said *“Neither this man nor his parents sinned but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.”* (John 9:3)

And then Jesus healed him as a sign that God’s plan to restore the world and rid it of evil and suffering was on track because the way Jesus would eventually secure this plan might cause people to think He failed.

Friends, Jesus Christ – God incarnate defeated suffering and evil in this world by allowing them to bring about His death on a cross.

The cross is a symbol of shame and scorn – it was the means to execute the lowest of criminals – pedophiles, abusers, serial killers, and God himself died upon it. This appears to be the ultimate triumph for evil and suffering – but in fact it is the beginning of their end.

Jesus Christ defeated evil and suffering not through an awesome display of power and triumph, but by entering into them and taking the worst they could deal out. That's what the cross symbolizes.

You see friends, for a Christian the goal is not to avoid evil or suffering, we don't believe in God because He can protect us from disaster, we believe in Him because He has promised that one day there will be no more evil and suffering.

This world will be made new – we need not despair because evil and suffering do not have the last word.

So stay loyal to God, to Jesus Christ who is making this promise come true and we're willing to face evil and suffer for it!

Friends at the end of Job's story, God vindicates Job's loyalty by instructing him to offer a sacrifice on behalf of his friends who had spoken wrongly about God, so they could be forgiven.

Friends it was Christ's loyalty to God which lead him to offer himself as the sacrifice for the times when we succumb to disloyalty in the face of suffering and evil and thus speak wrongly of God – and we all do it.

Maybe you've faced evil and suffering and loss in your life and today the story of Job has helped you come to realize that God has only ever been your assurance policy – maybe a "blessed assurance" policy – but a policy nonetheless.

Maybe you desire to believe in God and love Him because God is God – as Job says in 42:5-6 *"My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."*

Maybe you have faced evil and suffering and loss in your life and felt abandoned by God and you've decided to give up on him.

Friends the story of Job helps us to see what is really going on, points us to the larger context of reality revealed in scripture and reminds us even if we are tempted to give up on God, even

if you and I speak wrongly of Him because of the evil and suffering we may see - God has never given up on us.

God has never given up on you! He has gone through evil and suffering to forgive you and give you eternal life in a world where evil and suffering is no more.

Friends, I may not be able to give you, and the scripture doesn't reveal the ultimate philosophical or theological answer to the question of "why does God allow suffering and evil?"

But it does tell us about what God has been able to accomplish in spite of them, even through them... and it's so amazing I can rest with not knowing the "why:"

As the Apostle Paul says in Romans 8:18 *"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."*

The question is no longer "why" but "how long until the Kingdom comes?" So come Lord Jesus – Amen.