

Worshipping God in Tragedy

Job 1:13-22 (NIV)

¹³ One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, ¹⁴ a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, ¹⁵ and the Sabeans attacked and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" ¹⁶ While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The fire of God fell from the heavens and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" ¹⁷ While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" ¹⁸ While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, "Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, ¹⁹ when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" ²⁰ At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship ²¹ and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." ²² In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

Every now and again, I throw out the phrase about someone that they seem like Mr. or Mrs. Job because they've had a series of tragedies come into their life one after another. Is that a fair moniker, to call someone a Job because they're experiencing lots of tragedy and loss? Is that all Job is?

It was a lot. 4 tragedies struck Job all on the same day. He lost all his farming equipment – 500 yoke of oxen and 500 donkeys. He lost all his herds who would provide clothing and food – 7,000 sheep. He lost all his transportation with his 3,000 camels being carried off. He lost all the manpower that maintained his wealth as all his servants save one from each instance were killed. Then he was informed that his 7 sons and 3 daughters perished in a tragic windstorm which collapsed the house on their family get together. The greatest man among all the people of the East was reduced to poverty in a single day.

Job was informed of all of this one right after another. I have an exercise you in the worship folder that is meant to help you empathize with Job. I had to do this for a class last year. I honestly hated the assignment, hated having to imagine personal loss on this scale. We have the advantage of being able to sit back and analyze what's all going on, imagine, not live, how it would feel. Job, though, had to be pretty numb as the news of all his losses kept piling up. How would Job respond and deal? How would you?

We know Job was described as "blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil." (verse 1) He worshiped God regularly and would even offer sacrifices for his adult kids to purify them just in case they might have accidentally sinned. Job's a good, godly dude, but Satan challenged Job's character. He told the LORD that the only reason Job worshiped him was because he had blessed him with all kinds of stuff. Satan saw Job as nothing more than his stuff. So, God allowed Satan to take it all away. God knew Job, knew his faith, knew that he was blameless and upright, feared God and shunned evil, and would continue to do so even when all the earthly blessings were taken away. God allowed this test because he knew the outcome and knew that it would strengthen Job and his faith in the end – much like what we saw with Abraham last week.

Even knowing that, it's still amazing to hear Job's response to all this compounding tragedy and loss: "At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.'" (verses 20-21) Yes, there was an expression of sorrow, of mourning, but at the same time he praised God! He worshiped God in tragedy. This is being Job – not that you are defined by an experience of a whole bunch of losses all grouped together, but the reaction to those losses of finding a reason to praise God in a moment when he has allowed such tragedy into your life.

Much like relating to Abraham last week, who of us would have reacted the same way as Job? The grief and sadness expressed in tearing his robe and shaving his head, yeah, we would have done that, but would we have immediately fell to the ground in worship of God, singing his praises for what he has done? Has that been your response when tragedy has struck your life? Or has it been to pull away from God, to stop coming to church – maybe because you aren't sure you can say anything good about God right now or because you don't want anyone to ask you about your grief or because you think that those who will talk to you will only talk to you about your grief and you don't want to deal with it? Has your reaction been to question God, maybe curse God, yell at him for allowing such heartache and devastation into your life? Has it been to give up on God all together, that a God who would do this to me, I don't want to have any part with him? Do you feel justified in responding by pulling away from God or by cursing him?

Job's response to such drastic tragedy in his life was to worship the LORD and praise his name. Even in the next chapter when God allowed Satan to take away Job's health and afflict Job with painful sores all over his body and Job's wife told him to curse God and die, Job responded, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" (Job 2:10) Job, wow could you respond to tragedy with worship and praise for the LORD?

Look again at Job's words of worship in tragedy: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." (verse 21) Job came into this world with nothing. God had given him life; Job didn't create it on his own. God had given him oxen and donkeys and sheep and camels; not an accomplishment of inheritance or hard work. The LORD had given him a wife and blessed him even more by giving him 10 children through God gift's of marriage. All of it, everything he had, all came from God. Job had no right to any of it. It was all a gift. Job recognized that. In this moment of tragedy, he worshiped God for all these gifts that he had been given but were now taken away. He had no right to complain or get mad about it all because he caused none of it. He owned none of it. God gave it all to him to enjoy.

Do we look at the blessings in our life with the same attitude or do we think that these things do belong to me, that I earned them, I worked for them, I made them happen, they rightfully belong to me, and you can't take them away? We take credit for these things, don't we? We believe that we are entitled to the things we have: family, wealth, good health, all of it. Sometimes it takes the removal of these blessings to show us that we were taking credit for them instead of giving credit to God.

Seeing Job's words cuts at our hearts. We hate it that we know that he's right. We hate it that we don't have rights to these things, that they are all gifts from God and that he gets to decide when we have them and when we don't. We hate it because it means that we are honestly not in control of our blessings, of our lives. We are not the owners of our blessings, but the stewards of them. God gives them to us to use wisely and care for until he decides to do something else with them.

When tragedy strikes, Job does not purely dwell on what was lost but also on what was given, to count what he still had. In all the things that were taken from Job this day, he still had the LORD. He still had the promised Savior from sin. Job's hope in God is expressed vividly later in the book: "I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!" (Job 19:25-27)

When tragedy strikes and you lose your blessings, your wealth, even your family, what do you still have that is worth worshiping God over? You still have what Paul related to us in our second Bible reading today: "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. (verse 6) Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!" (verses 9-10)

Like Job, maybe it takes losing everything to realize that we still have God. We still have his life lived for us. We still have his death died for us. We still have his resurrection from the dead as a promise that death will not be the final act to take all good things away from us. At all times, we have Christ and what he did for us. We have peace with God. This is who we are. We are not defined by our blessings, by our wealth, our stuff, or even our families. We're not even defined by our tragedies. We are defined by what the LORD has given us. This peace with God, this forgiveness, this is the most important thing we will ever have. This is how Job was able to worship God in the midst of so many and such severe tragedies. This is how we can too.

"In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing." (verse 22) Can we be known as a Job? Can we be known as a person who suffers through tragedy and yet never ceases to praise God for all the things he gives us, for all that we still have in the midst of severe tragedy and loss? Imagine the impact on the people around us as we live a faith like Job's, for them to see you worship God in tragedy and not pull away or curse God. Imagine the impact you can have on others showing them that you are not defined by the people and the things that God has blessed you with or the tragedies that you have experienced, but that your life and your worth is defined by your God and your Savior who loves you unconditionally and forgives all your sins, who never leaves you or forsakes you. May we be known to have a faith like Job's that we worship God through tragedy because we have the greatest blessings given through him that he will never take away from us. Amen.