

Calamity!

September 17, 2017

Job 1:13-22

Are you sitting down? Those are terrifying words. Right? What does that assume? It assumes that the news about to be delivered is so shocking in one direction or another that you will likely fall over, faint, crumple, or whatever. I remember making such a phone call one day. I asked if the person was alone and if they were sitting down. Then I proceeded with some really, really bad news. It was no fun. In fact, the emergency personnel on my end of the call stayed right with me, concerned for me and how I would handle it.

We see that same scenario here in Job 1. After last week's heavenly board meeting in the throne room of God, the focus turns to scene on earth, specifically Job's home. Since later in the scene the text tells us that he rises, I picture him seated before that. He may have begun the scene seated as if relaxing, reclining. But this is where everything falls apart in Job's world.

As we approach this text, I remind you of the way it is presented. This is not an historical account so much as a play being presented. The spotlight is fixed directly on Job. The scene develops as characters enter the stage and deliver their messages. And then we see the dramatic response of Job. We have been awaiting his response. We have prepped with the consequences of his response...and then we get it. I admit that each time I read it I am shocked by it. I am drawn into the scene, I imagine myself as Job, and then I read his response and am blown away. I still can't believe it.

The scene then ends with the assessment of Job's response: he passed the test. In spite of all that happens, unbelievable things, still he passes the test. Yahweh wins the wager! But then we see that this is but act I and there is another act, another test. So, this is bad, really bad, but the next scene will be worse. This is why we hate the book of Job. Are you ready for this? Are you sitting down?

Follow along as I read today's text, Job 1:13-22.

Main point: All of our "stuff" comes to us as a gift from God and can be taken back at His discretion.

As Job rightly attests, we all come into this world with nothing and leave this world with nothing. What happens with our stuff in between OUGHT NOT affect our relationship with God. Is he right? Of course he is. Job gets it. Job is a wise man. Under the worst imaginable circumstances here, Job speaks wisdom, profound wisdom, other worldly wisdom. Job here speaks as the man of God.

As we go through this text, it will not be necessary to unpack it so you can understand it. Simply put, Job loses everything, tragically, instantly, in ways that clearly show something out of the ordinary is taking place. Satan has done his job well. But I would like you to notice how the scene is painted. This is artwork, and put together in an expert way. We are all drawn in. So, what we must consider is why. What is the point that the author is driving home? And what is that point supposed to teach us? How should it change us? That is key to this text. (2 parts)

I Bad news: everything is gone! vv. 13-19

Finally! We now get to see Job. We have heard him described, we have listened in on a bizarre conversation about him in the heavenly realm. And now we meet him. The scene begins with life as we would expect and desire for a wealthy, blessed man. Life is just going on.

v.13- One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house,

Notice the "One day" marker that draws us into a story. This verse harkens back to the description earlier in the chapter of a life of leisure lived by Job's children. They were enjoying life together at the home of the oldest sibling's home. The thing we need to notice though is that the focus is not on them. The focus will immediately shift to Job. This scene described in v.13 does not come into focus until the 4th messenger arrives. It is almost like the sweep of a camera showing a scene, giving clues, setting us up for what follows. And the

point of the picture is that Job's family is enjoying the good life. Everything is going according to plan. Meanwhile...

14 a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby,

The first character to speak is a messenger, one of the countless servants that Job had. It is as if the camera shows Job seated in his living room, readying himself to cleanse his children and offer sacrifices on their behalf at the conclusion of the current round of feasting. Life is normal. But suddenly, bursting onto the stage is messenger #1 with an urgent message. Notice how he begins it here. Just as the family members were going about their normal routine, so it is with the animals. The tractors (oxen) are in the field plowing and the pickups (donkeys) are gassing up for the next day's trip. Everything is normal. So the first words out of the messenger's mouth is that everything was going normally until...

15 and the Sabeans attacked and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

We do not know precisely who the Sabeans are, although they are mentioned in two other places in the Old Testament (Isaiah 45 and Joel 3). Here, they simply show up and attack, taking the oxen and donkeys while killing all of the servants. So, the first calamity is an attack by thieves. I can't help but think that Job's wealth was so vast and great that there wouldn't be enough soldiers to protect. We are not told at all about him being a part of a particular country. It seems to be just this one guy and not a nation.

Then we see this detail that the messenger is the only servant to survive the attack, and that he knew his new mission was to inform Job of what happened. So, the day began with 1,000 oxen and 500 donkey and all the servants necessary to take care of them. But now that is reduced to zero oxen, zero donkeys, and one servant to deliver the bad news.

16 While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, “The fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”

This almost reads like a script or a screenplay. Messenger #2 bursts into the room with more bad news. Lightning (fire of God from the sky) just struck the sheep and all the servants caring for them and they all died. In fact, they were all burned up. I picture this cluster of sheep, huddling together with the shepherds surrounding them. All of a sudden a bolt of lightning comes down from heaven and kills them all, leaving burning corpses and clouds of stench. Again we are told that exactly one servant escaped and he knew his mission was to inform Job. So, once more, the scene begins with everything as you would dream, 7,000 sheep grazing under the watchful eye of their shepherds. Suddenly, there are zero sheep and only one shepherd who turns into the bearer of bad news. Whereas the first source of calamity was thieves, this one was nature, a lightning strike.

17 While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, “The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”

Again, before he gets his message all out, another messenger rushes in and interrupts the conversation to deliver his bad news: invaders from the north had carried out a planned attack on Job’s camels. They killed the caretakers and took the 3,000 camels. Here we have the details of a specific plan and yet the sudden nature of the attack. Once more the “stuff” is all taken and the servants are all killed...except one. This one escaped to deliver the bad news to Job. We now have two acts of thievery and I natural disaster. Result: no sheep, no oxen, no camels, and no servants who cared for them. All of the measures of Job’s wealth has now been reduced to zero. He has nothing. But wait, there is more.

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!”

One last time, another messenger rushes in before the previous conversation has concluded with more bad news. We are returned to the picture of blessing which began this scene with the same description. “Your family was gathered to feast.” Now we see the significance of that previous mention. Something disastrous has happened to that scene. This time it is a mighty wind, another act of nature, which pushed on the whole house, seemingly from all directions, causing the house to collapse, killing all of the gathered children. Notice that the thieves came from the north and south (probably), above, and all around. The attacks came from every direction. Again, everyone is dead and only one servant has escaped to relay the message.

We have now seen the completed pattern. What picture emerges? In a matter of just a few minutes or hours, disaster has struck Job’s world, taking everything that was important to him (except his wife, who isn’t mentioned until the next chapter.) Two disasters were from natural sources, two from enemies. The results were all the same, every person dead, every animal either dead or stolen. All those blessings mentioned earlier in the text are now gone in four separate incidents, all at the same time.

Now, if you are Job and the 4th servant comes running into the room, what would you be thinking? You already know it is bad news, you just can’t imagine what is left to destroy. And then you find out it is your family, your most precious stuff. They are all dead. Again, what would you think? Would you think this was all a coincidence? Obviously not. Would you blame the Sabeans or the Chaldeans? Surely, but not completely. There is more going on in this situation. I see here that the 4 disasters happening at the same time, reported in unending messages of bad news paints a very different picture than simply one huge disaster.

In other words, the way this all played out leads us to no other conclusion than that something bigger is happening here. This is not just a disaster, a large disaster, a complete disaster. This is a series of complete disasters happening at the exact same time with the exact same result. We are left not being able to blame one cause, one enemy, one hurricane, or tornado, or lightning strike, or North Korea. This scene could only have come from Sovereign God. Right? O

yes, satan has done his job well. This happened to maximize the guilt of Sovereign God. If such a sequence could happen under the watchful eye of Almighty God, then what does this say about Him? Especially since Job has lived an upright life with all the indications of being blessed by God. What went wrong?

II. Response: The man of God blesses God and does not curse Him. vv. 20-22

I can think of no more shocking words in all of Scripture than those recorded here. Job's response defies description. In fact, it reminds me of Jesus' response (ahead of time in the Garden) "Nevertheless, not my will but Yours be done." Hmmm...

20 At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship

Finally, Job arises. This is the moment we have been waiting for. How will he respond to this unbelievable succession of bad news? I picture this scene taking place in slow motion with dramatic music. He gets up, he tears his outer robe as a sign of heartbreak and grief. He shaves his head as a sign of lament, he collapses to the ground...and he worships! Can you see how these final two words are designed to kick us in the stomach? It doesn't tell us that he wept or cried out hysterically, though surely he did. There was no drool streaming from his mouth. He did not instantly turn into some blubbery mess. He fell to the ground and worshipped. Unbelievable! Unexpected! Now WE are left with mouths wide open, drool trickling out of the corner. We can't explain this. We have no words. We are left going, "something weird is happening here." How could Job respond to such a thing with worship? Doesn't he realize that his whole world has just been destroyed? Everyone would understand if he would go berserk. But he doesn't, he worships.

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."

These are the first words in the whole unfolding drama from the mouth of Job. “I came into this world with nothing. I will go out of this world with nothing. It all has come to me from the hand of Yahweh. It is only taken by the hand of Yahweh. Praise the name of Yahweh!” Shocking, is it not? The first part is just a recognition of the truth, you are born with nothing, you can take nothing with you. That is simply stating the facts. That is a good perspective.

The next thing that he says shows he understands the sovereignty of one true God. Nothing is outside the scope of the authority of Yahweh. He is over all. Now, this might offend us, challenge us, frustrate us, but it is true. In other words, some would say there are two rival gods, Yahweh and satan. Sometimes God wins, sometimes satan wins. Sometimes bad things happen to good people, so that must mean that satan won. That sounds good, but it is not good theology.

The truth is that there is one true God and a whole bunch of phonies. Nothing good or bad happens outside of His authority. The part that makes our brains spin is that this sovereignty of God does NOT mean He is to blame for evil, for disaster, for calamity. He is not. He never has been. He never will be. Others are responsible, we are responsible, but He is not. Calamity is not just random chance, it is not that God is fickle, it is not that He is neglectful or uncaring. He IS sovereign, and yet bad stuff happens, calamity happens, hurricanes wreak havoc. Both of those things are true at the same time.

I know it is common to talk in terms of “cause” and “allow.” God doesn’t cause, but He allows. And certainly we see a hint of that here in the previous scene. But the Scriptures do not dwell on such a distinction. It simply states that He is Lord, and bad stuff happens. And the fact that bad stuff happens does not mean He is at fault, nor that He is less than sovereign. So Job got it right. “The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away.” Good theology, even if it blows our minds and causes us great internal strife.

But the next thing Job says blows our minds, “May the name of the LORD be praised.” Notice the way this is worded. This is more than “I praise Yahweh.” This is, “Everyone everywhere ought to praise Yahweh.” It is a call to worship. Not only does he not curse Yahweh, not only does he bless Yahweh, but he urges others to bless Yahweh. That blows my mind. In light of all that had happened, Yahweh ought to be everyone’s God. That is remarkable.

Remember, Job knows nothing of the previous scene in heaven. He has no clue that he is under the microscope, that the camera is fixed on him. He is simply going about his daily life, doing his daily things, minding his own business, and all of a sudden calamity comes upon him. No, four calamities come upon him at the same time, each total, fitting together to form an unmistakable pattern. Something beyond Job has just happened, resulting in the loss of all his blessings from God (except his wife, of course!). His response? It was all just stuff given to me by God. It has been taken away under the watchful eye of God. I want everyone to praise my God.

22 In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

These are the words we wanted to hear. Job passed the test. In fact he aced it! No sin, no cursing of God, no accusations against God that God sinned against him. God was free to do as He pleased. I wish everyone would praise Him.

Remember, these are the words here of the narrator, or the announcer with the James Earl Jones voice. This represents the perspective of God. Job passed the test. The wager is over. Yahweh won! End of story? Not quite. Next week we get to phase 2.

If we believe this passage is the Word of God, then what should be different about our lives?

This is the scary part.

- 1) We will not treasure our treasures.
- 2) We will grieve, but we will not blame God when they are taken away.
- 3) We will bless and not curse.
- 4) We will not allow calamity to ruin our relationship with God.