

Job 1:1-5 – “There Was a Man”
Psalm 34
John 1

January 29, 2012

I have chosen Psalm 34 because it includes many of the key words and themes of Job 1-2.
“I will bless the LORD at all times”
(Job refused to curse God)
the fear of God, turning from evil, the upright ...

For that matter, Psalm 34 confidently asserts
that “none of those who take refuge in the LORD will be condemned.”

That confident assertion is precisely what the book of Job questions –
and then, in the end, affirms.

Sing Psalm 34
Read John 1

Introduction: A Difficult Job

Rolf Caylor rightly pointed out in his fast-day remarks last fall
that Job’s question is not “why do the righteous suffer?”

Job’s question, which we will hear in chapter 3, is
“why is light given to one who is in misery,
and life to the bitter in soul,
who long for death, but it comes not,
and dig for it more than for hidden treasures,
who rejoice exceedingly and are glad when they find the grave?
Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden,
whom God has hedged in?” (3:20-23)

Job’s question is “why am I not dead?”

Or to turn the question around,
“why am I still alive?”

But even Job’s question is not the same thing as the question of the *book of Job*.
Job and his three friends are not aware of the “big picture.”
They do not understand Satan’s challenge –
nor do they know that God has held up Job as his faithful servant.
Job and his friends engage in a debate about wisdom, justice, and suffering –
but they really don’t know what is going on.

[Incidentally,
this is an important reminder for us!
If we would learn to speak rightly of God,

then we need to remember that we *don't* know all that God is doing in history.
All we see is my immediate context.

Job has *no idea* what God is doing!

Just like you have *no idea* what God is doing.

But God hasn't called us to know what *he* is doing!

He has called us to believe on his Son, Jesus Christ,

and to love him with our whole heart, and our neighbor as ourselves!]

So inside the wisdom debate of chapters 3-37,

Job and his friends will debate Job's question, (why am I still alive?)

but no one inside the debate understands what *we* know from chapters 1-2.

And so really, Job's question is *not* the same as the question of the *book of Job*.

The question of the *book of Job* is found in the voice of Satan:

"Does Job fear God for no reason?" (1:9)

Job fears God because God has done good things for him.

What if all that were to change?

If God would turn his face away from Job,

will Job curse God?

If you do not keep *this* question in mind,

you will not understand what the book of Job is doing.

So behind Job's question ("why is light given to one who is in misery?")

is the question of the book of Job ("does Job fear God for no reason?"),

but there is a third question that we also need to keep in mind!

Because behind the book of Job's question

is the canonical question of Job.

What do I mean by the canonical question of Job?

Well, the book of Job does not exist in a vacuum.

The book of Job is part of the Bible.

The book of Job was inspired by God,

and included in the sacred scriptures,

as a part of the Wisdom books (with Psalms and Proverbs).

We often think about the Wisdom books

in a way that detaches them from their setting in redemptive history.

But while Job is very hard to pin down in terms of his own historical context,

it is very easy to see the context of the *book* of Job.

Because Job is everything that Israel is supposed to be.

Job has everything that Israel is supposed to have.

And all of this because Job worships the way Israel is supposed to worship.

Today we will look briefly at three things about Job:

his wisdom, his wealth, and his worship.

1. There Was a (Wise) Man...Who Feared God (v1)

¹ *There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.*

Historical narratives usually begin by connecting the narrative with the “rest of the story.”

The location of the land of Uz is not known for certain,

though there are two possibilities:

there is a reference to an Aramean ruler named Uz in Genesis 10,

there is also a nephew of Abraham named Uz in Genesis 22,

and a relative of Esau named Uz in Genesis 36.

So the land of Uz could either be in modern Syria or Iraq,

or somewhere to the south and east, near Edom (in modern Jordan).

The prophet Jeremiah refers to “the land of Uz” in connection with the Edomites,

(Jeremiah 25:15-20; Lamentation 4:21)

and there are strong Edomite connections in many of the names in the book of Job;

but Job is called one of the greatest of all the “people of the east,”

which might point towards the Aramean/Syrian location.

So the location of our story is not entirely clear.

What is clear is that Job is not an Israelite.

His name is not a Hebrew name.

The only Hebrew word that resembles “iyyob” is “ayab” –

which means “enemy” –

a word that Job himself uses when he asks,

“Why do you hide your face, and count me as your enemy?” (13:24)

[see Elihu’s quotation of this in 33:10]

Job’s three friends will all have strong Edomite connections.

We know how they connect to the Abrahamic story.

But Job himself has no such connection.

We do not know his father’s name – we do not know his tribal name.

Indeed, in other Semitic languages, the name ‘iyyob’ could mean,

“where is my father?”

But the opening words of the book of Job

encourage us to set aside the whole covenant history of Israel for a moment.

Let's not complicate things by bringing in God's covenant
with Abraham, Israel, or David.

Take Job – this man who is not connected to the rest of the story –
neither Jew nor Gentile.

And yet – Job is not ignorant of the true God!

By placing him in “the land of Uz” (whether Aramean or Edomite),
Job is within the orbit of the knowledge of God.

And, what is more, *Job is all that Israel is supposed to be.*

“that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.”

Job is blameless – a word used of Noah, Abraham, and Jacob –
it is what is expected of an animal used in a sacrifice (a lamb without blemish);
it is what is expected of the physical attributes of a priest (without blemish);
it is what is commanded of Israel in Joshua 24,
“serve him without blemish”

The idea is that Job is a complete man – a whole man – a “perfect” specimen of a man.

God said to Abraham,

“I am God almighty, walk before me and be blameless” –
well, that is what Job has done!

The point here is not “sinless perfection” –

the point here is that Job is what a man is supposed to be.

But Job is also “upright.”

A man who is upright is one who does what is right.

Deuteronomy 6:18 says,

“And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD,
that it may go well for you,
and that you may go in and take possession of the good land
that the LORD swore to give to your fathers.”

Pretty much every time you see the phrase “did what was right in the sight of the LORD”
you are seeing this word!

It's not a complicated word:

an upright man does what is right before God.

(If you think about the alternative, this makes sense:

the alternative to being upright is to be crooked – to be bent or twisted;
sin has twisted us,

and so God gives us examples of upright men in scripture
so that we can see what *we* ought to look like.)

Job also fears God.

In Exodus 18, Moses appointed judges over the people who “feared God.”

The idea of “fearing God” is frequently used in the context of judging,
because if you fear God, then you will not fear man.

If you are a judge, and you are afraid of what man will do,
then you are likely to let the “important” people sway your judgment.

“He’s wealthy – so I don’t want to get on his bad side!”

“She’s poor – she’s used to getting stepped on, so what’s one more ‘inconvenience’!”

If you fear God, then you are more concerned with what *he thinks*.

She may be poor, but if I don’t give her justice, God will give me justice!

He may be rich, but if I don’t do something about his oppressing the poor,
then God will hold me accountable!

Today, as we ordain two new deacons,

we are setting apart these men to serve as “judges”
in the matter of mercy ministry,

and the stewardship of the physical resources of the church.

They will be called on to make decisions (judgments) as to how to lead us in these areas.

If they fear God,

then they will judge wisely.

But all of you are called upon to “judge” in various ways.

As parents you must fear God rather than your children.

Ed Welch has written a helpful book entitled,

“When People Are Big, and God Is Small.”

When people are big and God is small,

then we make decisions (judgments) based on what we think we’ll get from others

but when we see all people in the light of the glory and majesty of God,

when we are more concerned with what God thinks of us,

than with what *people* think of us,

then we make decisions based on truth.

(Okay, some of you hear that and you think that what this really means

is that you get to ignore other people and just do what *you* want!

After all, you have to follow the truth!

Who cares about people!

But when you truly fear God,

then you truly love people!

As long as I fear my wife, I cannot love her.

As long as I am afraid of what she thinks of me,

I may try to manipulate her –
I may do things in order to get her to do what I want –
but that's not love!

When I stop fearing man, and start fearing God,
then I can love and serve others aright –
because I love and serve others out of my love and fear of God!

And then Job is said to “turn away from evil.”
This is what Psalm 34 says that the righteous man should do!
“depart from evil, and do good.”
At the heart of Job, in Job 28,
Job reports the word of God,
“Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom,
and to turn away from evil is understanding.” (28:28)

The one who fears God will turn away from evil.
You see it coming – and you just get out of the path!

So Job is blameless and upright, one who fears God and turns away from evil.

So *why* do we need to know all this about Job?

One of the assumptions that is tested in the book of Job
is the assumption that bad things happen because you are a bad person.

The author of Job rules this position out from the start.
When we get to the wisdom debate,
you need to know that Job is innocent.

Job is everything that Israel was supposed to be!

2. There Was a (Wealthy) Man...the Greatest of All the People of the East (v2-3)

² *There were born to him seven sons and three daughters.* ³ *He possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys, and very many servants, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east.*

And what is more,
Job has all that Israel is supposed to have

The way the text sets this up suggests that Job's moral character (his wisdom) in verse 1
is the foundation for his wealth in verses 2-3.

He has seven sons – a full quiver –
and three daughters – making ten children (another number of completeness).

He has 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels – not to mention 500 yoke of oxen and 500 female donkeys,
and very many servants.

The result is that Job “this man”
was the greatest of all the people of the east.

So far we are operating in the standard realm of Hebrew wisdom:
we have a righteous, God-fearing man,
and he is very wealthy.

That’s the way it should be!
Job is all that Israel should be.
And so, not surprisingly, Job has all that Israel should have.

And all of this because Job worships the way Israel is supposed to worship

3. There Was a (Worshipful) Man...Who Was Very Devout (v4-5)

⁴ *His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them.* ⁵ *And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, “It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed^[a] God in their hearts.” Thus Job did continually.*

Job is not an Israelite,
but he sets a high standard for devotion and worship!

His sons used to hold a feast – each one on his day.
The picture here is of the seven sons, each a prince of the land with his own household,
holding a seven-day feast,
each hosting on his day.
In the ancient world feasts are never religiously neutral.
A feast is a religious occasion –
and so the picture is one of Job’s children celebrating God’s goodness.

Not only is Job himself a blameless, upright man,
but his children appear to be following in his ways.

But Job is concerned that perhaps as they are celebrating God’s goodness,
maybe they have “cursed God in their hearts.”

Literally, it says, maybe they have “*blessed* God in their hearts,”
but this is a common Hebrew euphemism:
it was considered impious to say “curse God” –
even if you are only saying “maybe *they* cursed God” –
and so they wrote the word “blessed” when they *really* meant the opposite!

There is undoubtedly an element of foreshadowing in this,
because at the end of chapter 1, Job will say,
“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return.
The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away;
blessed be the name of the LORD.”
And as if in recognition of the ambiguity of this statement,
the narrator adds,
“In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.”
Job will *not* curse God.

Job’s continual practice in offering burnt offerings for his children bears fruit –
and when his wife says “Curse God and die,”
Job refuses!

But there is one more thing that we should see about Job’s worship.
His children celebrate the feast for seven days.
And after the seven days of the feast,
Job would summon his children and consecrate them
and he would offer burnt offerings for his children.

Gregory the Great comments on this verse:

12. But whereas the seven brethren are described as making feasts, each one in his day, and whereas, when the days of feasting were over, Job is related to have offered seven sacrifices; the account plainly indicates that, in offering a sacrifice on the eighth day, the blessed Job was celebrating the mystery of the Resurrection. For the day, which is now named ‘The Lord’s day,’ is the third from the death of our Redeemer, but in the order of creation it is the eighth, which is also the first in the work of creation, but because, on coming round again, it follows the seventh, it is properly reckoned the eighth; whereas then it is said that he offered sacrifices on the eighth day, it is shewn that he was full of the Spirit of sevenfold grace, and served the Lord for the hope of resurrection.

[Gregory, *Moralia in Job*]

I’m not sure how much Job himself understood of all this –
but certainly Job worships on the eighth day.

Israel’s worship was also oriented to the eighth day.

The Feast of Booths had sacred assemblies on the first and eighth day of the feast,
and Pentecost is 50 days after Passover ($7 \times 7 + 1$).

So Job, who is not connected to Israel’s history by genealogy or geography
is connected liturgically to Israel’s worship!

Conclusion: There Was a Man

Daniel Estes rightly points out that if Job was a descendent of Adam,
then we know that he was a sinner

(for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God);

but Estes also suggests that the point of the text is to show us a perfect man.

Solomon will say in his prayer at the dedication of the temple
that there is no one who does not sin –
but there are several figures in the OT who are portrayed as perfect men.

And there is a good reason for this!
We *need* a perfect man!

We saw this in the Chronicler's portrayal of David and Solomon.
If you just read Chronicles,
you might think that David and Solomon never sinned!
Samuel/Kings makes it clear that they *royally* botched it!
But the Chronicler wants you to see David and Solomon as perfect kings.

If Job is all that Israel is supposed to be –
if Job has all that Israel is supposed to have –
because Job worships God the way Israel is supposed to worship –
then what happens to Job prepares us to see what will happen to Jesus.

If you try to draw a straight line from Job to yourself,
you'll wind up getting frustrated.

Because (for one reason) you are not as blameless and upright as Job –
and (for that matter) Job is utterly unique in all of scripture.

Of all the people who have walked the earth,
Job alone was singled out to receive the great (honor?) of being tested in this way.
I really don't think that God is saying,
"Have you considered my servant Peter!"

Before you can see how Job speaks to *you*,
you need to see first how Job shows you Jesus!

Because when God says to Satan,
"Have you considered my servant Job?"
he uses a word "my servant"
which he elsewhere applies to "my servant Abraham" (Gen 26:24),
"my servant Moses" (Numbers 12:7-8; Joshua 1:2, 7),
"my servant Caleb" (Numbers 14:24),
"my servant David" (2 Samuel 3:18; 7:5, 8; 1 Kings 11)
"my servant Isaiah" (Isaiah 20:3),
and "my servant Israel" (Isaiah 41-53, etc.)

Job is the servant of the LORD – the innocent one who suffers for no fault of his own.
"It pleased the LORD to crush him" –
that is what Isaiah will say about the suffering servant;

it is what the book of Job will say about Job.

“My servant Job” is about to become the “suffering servant” –
he is about to *suffer* all that Israel was supposed to suffer.

And in this way Job is set before us as a picture of Christ.

For our Lord Jesus Christ – the suffering servant – did not come to be served,
but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

And in Christ we are set free from the dominion of sin and death,
so that we are now blameless in his sight – adopted as fellow heir with Christ –
as John says, “to all who did receive him, who believed in his name,
he gave the right to become children of God,
who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man,
but of God.”

And in the church, Christ calls us to express this same love and service to one another –
and he has called certain men to lead us in this service as deacons.