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Sermon ~ "How Long, O Lord?"

Oh Job – one of those characters that we have heard of our whole lives – most often as a description of someone who has endured much loss or hardship or exhibited extraordinary patience.

These characterizations are true but Job's story offers so much more. As is often the case in our bible stories, a small piece has been extracted and highlighted with the rest left to history.

My initial foray into the book of Job has been intriguing – I am looking forward to our summer of study.

I hope that you will share your own thoughts and ideas as we move through the next 8 weeks.

Let me start by introducing Job.

Our writer, of whom we know nothing, tells us only a few things about Job:

1. Job lived in the land of Uz, which means that he was not from Israel. Uz is mentioned in the fourth chapter of Lamentations where it says, "Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, you that live in the land of Uz; but to you also the cup shall pass." Uz is identified with the kingdom of Edom, roughly in the area of modern day Jordan.

Job was believed to live in this land in the time of the biblical ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

He is placed in that time, because he offers sacrifices for his family's well being which would not have happened once the priestly era began.

One author characterized Job as "A man who knew almost nothing of God and yet worshipped and trusted God."

2. The second thing we know about Job is his name, really just his first name. There is no genealogy listed in the book, no family of origin mentioned and the name itself has no particular meaning.

3. Next we learn that Job had a stellar character – he was known as a man of integrity, a moral man who cared for others and had a genuine, authentic commitment to his religion.

We are told that he was "blameless" which means that he was a man of personal integrity, not sinless perfection.

Christopher Ash, in his commentary on the book of Job says,

"Job was not a perfect man but a genuine believer."

Job exercised daily repentance, turning away from evil and sin, making conscious choices in thoughts, words and deeds.

He is an example of a man that we might emulate.

Each day Job offered sacrifices for his children, afraid that they might not be believers.

How many of us have offered daily prayers for the well being of our children – fearing that they might not be believers?

4. We know that Job was prosperous, perhaps the richest man in Uz – he is identified as “the greatest of all the men in the East.”

This is really all we know about Job.

Let me introduce his family and friends whom we will hear from throughout the book:

Job’s wife: this woman is nameless but we know that she has given Job seven sons and three daughters who seem to get along with one another, gathering for regular feasts at each other’s homes. Job’s wife has but one line in the long story – when things are particularly bad she says, “Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God and die.”

I’m not sure what to make of Mrs. Job – but I can understand her agony at losing all of her children and watching her husband struggle with one calamity after another.

We will hear from Job’s friends in the weeks ahead:

Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, Zophar the Naamathit and Elihu.

Each one will have their own interpretation of Job’s dilemma and their own prescription for remediation.

The only other two voices in the book are The Lord and his adversary, the Satan.

We will examine both of these voices as they emerge.

Job is a story that will challenge us to explore our own beliefs in the power of God and the presence of evil in the world.

My recent trip to France has provided a great backdrop for this reflection.

France is a visible witness to changing fortunes, values and priorities.

We visited an Abbey, once a towering testimony to the power of the monastic tradition in France, now been repurposed as a winery.

The mighty cathedral naves were filled with giant oak barrels, graciously aging wine in a peaceful, sacred setting.

We rode our bikes through villages empty of life.

Economic turmoil has forced people out of ancestral homes and into the cities for work.

Paris-once a place of war and destruction- is now, again, a beautiful, thriving city.

Visiting the galleries and museums we saw artwork that tells the story from creation to the modern world.

When we study our ancestors we recognize that the frailties of humanity are eternal.

Job's challenges are not substantially different than those we face today.

What we must explore are the values that we live out as we respond to those challenges.

Do we choose nonviolence as a response to aggression?

Are we able to forgive our enemies?

Is it possible to reach out and help a neighbor who is dramatically different than you in every way?

Does our faith remain strong in the face of hardship?

You have heard before that one of my favorite quotes is

“What you see depends on where you stand.”

As we explore the book of Job I am going to urge you to take a close look at where you stand and how you make decisions in your life.

On our bike trip last week each participant was given a route sheet daily that outlined the roads that we would take, the turns to look for and suggestions on where to stop for food.

We received the sheets at dinner each night and it was interesting to watch how each person scanned the material looking for something different.

Some read the descriptions of long kilometers and steep hills with great anticipation; others with great trepidation.

You could say that no one gives us “route sheets” for life or you could say that scripture is like getting a route sheet for life.

When you read the bible and understand what God is asking of you do you find it an exciting challenge or a cumbersome burden?

Do you look for and celebrate Gods blessings or do you bemoan your burdens?

Let's take a few minutes to examine where our study of Job will start – what is your trust level of God?

What would you like to see change or deepen this summer as a result of our study?

What is the biggest challenge you face in answering the questions posed by the book of Job?

Discussion Time