**God’s Sovereignty in the Space Between (Job)**

**Introduction**

* One of the last things Dr. Poplin did was come into my office and ask if I would like to preach? I said, “Wow, I’m honored and taken aback. Is it because of my spiritual and theological contributions to the sermon team?” He said, “No, you can speak from the phonebook for all I care, I just looove to hear you talk!”
* We’re in a series called The Space Between
  + Last week Rob introduced the series talking about the Space Between as it pertains to our leaders here at Carmel Baptist Church.
  + This week, from a more personal perspective, we are going to look at **God’s Sovereignty** in **The Space Between**.
* To do this we will be looking at the story of Job (Turn with me there to chapter 1)
  + For many of you I am sure Job is your favorite book in the Old Testament, right up there with Nahum and Leviticus.
  + But it has always been considered an important book!
    - Fun Fact: Job is almost unanimously considered by scholars to be the oldest book in the bible, dating before Moses and probably before Abraham.
    - Job was a real man in history to which other books testify
      * Ezekiel speaks on two occasions of the righteousness of Job (Ez. 14:14,20)
      * As does James in the New Testament (Js. 5:11)
      * Paul who quotes from Job in his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 3:19).
    - And fragments of the book of Job were preserved through ancient history in the Dead Sea Scrolls.
    - God clearly wanted us to remember his story.
* But many people don’t know what to do with Job!
  + He’s a righteous man who suffers terribly
  + And the book presents more questions than answers
  + So how do we get a good picture of God’s sovereignty from Job’s life?
    - Let us turn there now and have a look…

Read Job 1:1-3

In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. He had seven sons and three daughters, he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yolk of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East.

**Continue with a paraphrase of Job’s story. Broad sweep from Job 1 – 42.**

Job was considered even by God to be the most righteous man on Earth. One day, the angels were presenting themselves before God, and Satan was there too. God asked Satan, “Where have you come from?” Satan basically said, “Nothing much, just roaming around.” And God said, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is none like him on the earth, he fears God and shuns evil.” Satan said, “Well, not for nothing, you’ve blessed the socks off the man, you’ve built a hedge around him and blessed the work of his hands. But strike everything he has and he will curse you to your face!” God said, “Very well, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself, do not lay a finger.” So Satan went out and did just that. A messenger came to Job one day saying that all his oxen and donkeys are gone and the robbers killed all the servants, and I’m the only one who has escaped to tell you. Another messenger interrupts him to tell him all his sheep and servants were killed with fire from God, I’m the only one who escaped to tell you. Another messenger interrupted that guy to say that some more thieves came and stole all his camels and killed all the servants except him who came to tell him. Lastly another man interrupted him to say that all his children were feasting when a mighty wind came and struck the house they were in and killed everyone except him who came to tell him. At this Job got up, tore his robe, shaved his head and fell to the ground in worship! He said, “Naked I came from my mothers womb and naked I shall return. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.” Recognize the song? And in all these things Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

Later on there’s another gathering in heaven and the angels are there and so is Satan. God asks Satan again, where have you come from? Satan’s like, “Nothing much, roaming around the earth, going back and forth in it.” God says again, “Have you considered my servant Job, there is none like him in all the earth, he is blameless and upright, he fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, even though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason. The Devil says, “Skin for skin! A man will give all he has for his own life, but stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face.” God said, “Go ahead” basically, and gave him permission to do anything to Job’s body except take his life. And so the Devil goes out and strikes Job’s body with sore from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet! Job takes a broken piece of pottery and scraped his wounds, and sat among the ashes. Now, Job’s wife comes to him and says, “Are you stil holding onto your integrity, curse God and die.” Job replies, “You are talking like a fooling woman! Should we accept good from the Lord and not trouble?” And in all this, the Bible tells us, Job did not sin in what he said.

Then Job’s friends hear about this and come to comfort him, they see him from a distance and can’t even recognize him. They tore their ropes and began to weep aloud. Then they sat on the ground with him dead silent for 7 days and 7 nights! Eventually Job breaks the silence and what begins the largest section of the book of Job is a series of speeches from him and all his friends. Job is basically hitting rock bottom, and his friends are miserable comforters, accusing him of sinning, because SURELY if you suffer it has to be because you sinned right?! All Job wants to do is ask God why and present his case before God. At the end of all the speeches, God finally speaks. If you have never read Job before, go ahead and read what God says about himself form chapter 38 on, it’ll literally put the fear of God in you!

The Lord answers Job out of the storm, “Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man, I will question you and you will answer me. Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions, surely you know!” And basically describing how he made the earth and holds it all together. He talks about how lighting bolts report to him, and how he says to the ocean, “this far and no further, this is where your proud waves hault” He uses epic imagery like this talking about his mastery over the most powerful anomalies and his dominance over the strongest animals. But then he paints the picture of his loving caring nature even in the midst of all this power. He says, “Do you watch when the doe gives birth, do you provide food for the raven when her young ones cry out to God?”

Job answers, “I am unworthy, how can I reply to you? I clap my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer, twice, but I will say no more.” But God isn’t finished. He says, “Brace yourself like a man, I will question you and you will answer me.” And he let’s Job have it again, God describes himself in ways, which would overwhelm anyone. Job answers God, “I know that you can do all things, no plan of yours can be thwarted.. You asked, ‘Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge. Surely I spoke of things I did not understand things too wonderful for me to know. You said, ‘Listen now and I will speak, I will question and you shall answer me. My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.”

After that, Job’s friends get in trouble and have to sacrifice to God, and Job has to pray for them so they get forgiven, and God restores everything to Job. And he died old and full of years.

* Job is 42 chapters long.
  + The first half of chapter 1, Job enjoys a good life,
  + Then there are over 40 chapters of suffering…
  + …before Job experiences relief and restoration in the final chapter.

Today I want us to resist the urge to jump to the end too quickly to the good stuff.

* We like to hear testimonies with a happy ending
* We don’t always know what to do with people who are still “in it”…
* … who are in “The Space Between”
* This is what St. John of the Cross would call, “The Dark Night of the Soul”

Illustration:

I was told at my graduation ceremony, next to each person you minister to in your pews, is a **pool of tears!”**

* We are more like Job than we think, because we are either in the midst of a Dark Night, about to enter one, or just coming out of one.

So in The Space Between the good times, I want us to ask 3 questions:

1. **Who?**
2. **What?** And,
3. **How?**

Firstly, **WHO** is this God that allows us to suffer?

Secondly, **WHAT** is our response to Him?

Thirdly, **HOW** are we even able to respond?

1. **WHO is this God?’**

* We know many things about God, His love, His patience and kindness…
* But before we were ever created, the one thing we know is that God is God!
* Job 23:13 says that God does whatever He pleases!
* Sit with that for a second…
  + God does whatever He likes!
  + Not, “God can do anything IF He wanted to…”
  + No, God does whatever He likes
  + Because God is sovereign
* We need to dispel one of the myths of Job
  + Sometimes we can “let God off the hook” by saying, “God did not bring trouble on Job, He only *allowed* it!”
  + Let us put it this way: If you were Job and lost everything including family, and you found out that Satan, asked God if He could do it, and God said, “Go ahead”, **Who would you blame?**
* In **Job 1:21-22**, Job says, “The Lord gave and *the Lord* has taken away, may the name of the Lord be praised. In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.”
* In **Job 2:10b**, Job says, “Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble? In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.”
* In **Job 42:11b**, the writer says, “They comforted and consoled him [Job] over all the trouble *the Lord* had brought upon him…”
* So we see that God can send *trouble*, without being guilty of *wrongdoing*!
  + When we fail to see God this way we see a God who has evil requests flying at Him from all direction, and He’s granting permission here and denying permission there and trying to keep up with it all.
  + But there is no idea we can have that God did not know infinitely before it was conceived
  + God is not keeping up – He’s in control!

But there’s more to God than just His sovereignty…

Illustration:

In the Chronicles of Narnia, there is a scene with the beavers where they are talking about Aslan, the Lion, who represents Jesus in the story. They ask, “Is he safe?” The beavers reply, “Heavens no! He is not safe, He is a Lion! But He is good!”

* This does not mean that God’s actions are governed by goodness!
* Again, God is not governed by anything – He is the governor!
* Rather, God does good because He IS good, and His actions never stray from His character.
* His sovereignty and His goodness are never separated.
  + But that does not mean that we will always be able to see it. Let me illustrate…

Illustration:

If we were to zoom in on the stitching of a garment and watch the trace of thread; we see a dash, then it disappears, then it appears and disappears again. Just because you cannot see the connection, doesn’t mean it is not in fact connected by a single thread.

* So where does that leave us? It leaves us in the realm of **faith**!
* Because if we can’t SEE His goodness, we have to TRUST in His goodness.
* When we are ‘here’ (left) or ‘here’ (right), in the good times, we can see His sovereignty and His goodness. But when we’re down here in The Space Between, we must walk by faith – which is a scary place to be.

Which leads to the second question…

1. **WHAT is our response?**

* Fear!
* Both Psalm 111:10 & Proverbs 9:10 say, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.
* Job 28:28 – says, “The fear of the Lord is wisdom”
* One of the myths we need to dispel is the way we think of the Fear of the Lord.
  + Often when we get to those passages we pause and say, “Now, we need to make sure that you understand that when we say ‘fear’, we don’t really mean ‘fear’; it’s more of a reverence or an awe.
  + But when people in the Bible encountered the living God, they were terrified.
  + Isaiah is an example of this, He sees God, and the train of His robe fills the temple and the foundations shake and Isaiah is terrified! Woa to me, I am undone, I am a man of unclean lips living among a people of unclean lips.
  + Or the apostle John in Revelation when he sees Jesus in His glorified state, just falls to the ground like a dead man at Jesus’ feet.
  + These characters in the Bible didn’t decide to ‘muster up some reverence’ or say, “Okay God is here, let’s show Him a little respect”…
  + No, it is this out of control fear of a God who is bigger than we could ever imagine.
  + So often we are guilty of putting God in a box and filing Him in our thoughts as a God we can manage.
  + What we need to do is let God out and learn to be friends with fear, because an unboxed God is a scary thing, and so is suffering!
    - **But God wants us to hold onto fear and journey through our suffering!**
    - So what does this mean?
* Let’s turn to my favorite verse in Job (13:15)

**“Though He slay me, yet I will hope in Him!”**

* + King David understood this principle very well!
  + 2 Samuel 24:14

We know about David’s sin with Bathsheba. If there could be two big sins in David’s life, this would be the other big one. And the punishment was far more severe. David conducts an unauthorized census, where he counts his fighting men, putting his trust in numbers rather than in the Lord. The Lord sends a prophet Gad to David saying. I am going to punish you and I’m giving you a choice, 3 years of famine, 3 months of fleeing from your enemies, or 3 days of plague. David’s response is remarkable! He says in verse 14, “I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men.” – *and so God sent the plague…*

* David held onto fear and he journeyed through his suffering
* He submitted to God’s sovereignty and trusted in His goodness.
* **If there’s one nugget I want you to get out of David’s story and Job’s story it is this: In your suffering, to fear God in His sovereignty all the while trusting in His goodness.**

1. **Our 3rd Question then is, HOW?**

* How do I make myself fear God?
* We already said that in the Bible these people who feared God didn’t simply muster up some reverence or show God a little respect
* They were terrified because they saw God!
* Listen to Job’s words in Job 42:5
  + “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.”
* The truth is, one day we will all face God, our Maker, and no matter who you are, when you see Him you will fear Him… we all will!
  + But where does that leave us now?
  + How do I fear a God I cannot see?
* Turn with me to John 14:8-9
  + Philip said, “Lord show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”
  + *Can you hear Philip asking your question?*
  + Jesus answered, “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”
* The writer of Hebrews says, “The son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being…” (Heb 1:3)
* Paul says to the Colossians, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.” (Col 1:15)
* But then you might be wondering, “What if I can’t see Jesus either?”

John 20

You may remember the story in John 20 of a disciple named Thomas. The other disciples had a chance to see the resurrected Jesus. Thomas was kind of left out, and said, “Unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my hand into His side, I will not believe” (20:25b). Then a week later, Jesus walks through a locked door and says, “Go ahead, Thomas,” and Thomas says, “My Lord and my God!”

* Vs. 29 – Then Jesus gives us the punch line, **“Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed!”**
* If we are to respond to God’s sovereignty appropriately by fearing God, we must believe in Jesus!
* John 6:29 says – “The work of God is this: to believe in the One He sent!”

When we are in The Space Between, we want a reason or a purpose or an answer!

* This is all Job wanted, “That I might face my maker and defend my ways to His face.”
* **God never gives Job the answer to His suffering, instead He gives Job Himself!**
* When we suffer, we want an answer, we want a reason and we want a purpose
* But God does not always give us an answer to our suffering, instead He gives Himself to us.
* AND the only thing standing between me and eternal suffering is Christ Himself!

One last myth in the book of Job I want us to dispel: is that sometimes we think that God is recklessly using Job to prove a point to Satan! But God instead uses Satan and suffering to make His glorious presence known to Job.

What does this mean? Let me illustrate using a personal story…

Years ago my grandfather had a lifesaving surgery to remove a brain tumor. During the procedure they nipped one of the nerves in his spine leaving him paralyzed. His mind was fully functional, but he was trapped in a body that hardly worked at all. We had to feed him, bathe him and do everything for him. He used to wonder why God had brought him back from certain death only to be trapped in a body like his. Initially he thought that God brought him back to suffer as a witness to my grandmother who was not a believer and to be there for her. But towards the end of his life he admitted, “Initially I thought God brought me back for Bobby (my grandmother), but now I know that God brought me back for me, to build my own character.”

God didn’t buffet my grandfather’s life around simply to make a point. Instead God used his suffering to make His glorious presence known to my grandfather.

* Because “God works all things to the good of those who love Him and are called according to his purposes in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:28).

When King David wrote the 23rd Psalm, he didn’t ask for relief or the stuff God could give him. Instead all he wanted was God’s glorious presence. “Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil [WHY?], for you are with me!” (Ps 23:4)

God doesn’t always promise us answers and reasons… He promises us His presence!

Even when Job’s story is over he never finds the answer to why he suffered, but he found comfort in God’s sovereignty.

Simply being in the presence of God’s sovereignty was enough to satisfy Job!

**Conclusion**

We set out to answer 3 questions

1. **Who** is this God that allows suffering?
2. **What** is our response to Him?
3. **How** do we respond to Him?
4. Who is God? He is Sovereign, but He is Good
5. What is our response? To fear Him, and trust in his goodness
6. How do we respond? By believing in the One He sent, Jesus Christ our Lord.
   1. And when we do that, we are promised God’s presence, which may not take away our pain, but will walk with us through the pain.

Closing Illustration:

Horatio Spafford was a well to do lawyer in Chicago in the late 1800’s. He and his wife Anne had lost their son at age 4 to scarlet fever. They still had four daughters, but it was not long after that that a great fire swept through Chicago burning their house down and some prime real estate he had recently invested in. Later he and his family planned a trip to get out of town on a vacation, in Britain. Horatio was detained by a pressing new business venture and sent the wife and kids ahead of himself. En route their ship collided with a British steamer and sunk in 12 minutes. Anne was rescued on floating debris shortly after. When she arrived in Britain she sent a brief telegraph to her husband, “saved alone, what shall I do…”

Immediately Horatio boarded a ship to be united with is grief stricken wife. It is said that the captain made Horatio aware when they passed the spot where the shipwreck happened. At that moment he penned the words, “When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, it is well, it is well with my soul.

Is it well with your soul? Let us pray…

*Prayer:*

*Lord, Your Word tells us to rejoice in our suffering, for suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope, and hope will not disappoint us, because You have poured out Your love into our heat by the Holy Spirit, whom You have given us (Rom 3:4-5). Yes, Lord you have given us even yourself! We fear you, we trust you and believe in your Son Jesus Christ, in whose Name we pray, Amen.*