

## TENACIOUS BEE Job 13:15

When we went to visit our daughter and her husband in Mississippi they took us on a little excursion to the Pensacola, Florida area to go to the beach. They did this in part because you can do pretty much all there is to do in Meridian, Mississippi in one afternoon. So they like to leave whenever they can. We planned to spend two nights at the beach. We got there the first day in the early evening. The typical weather pattern for that area in July is hot and humid, with some brief pop up thunderstorms in the afternoon that usually clear out quickly. That's not what we had. That next day it rained pretty much the entire day off and on. This was no pop up thunderstorm. There was no going to the beach that day. That was all right. We went to the Pensacola Naval Aviation museum and had a nice day, knowing that the next day the weather would be better. We planned to spend that day at the beach and drove home in the evening. Sure enough the next day was glorious. It was warm and sunny. It wasn't unpleasant, just perfect for a day at the beach. The ocean was a gorgeous turquoise and blue and the water was warm. We were there for about three hours. As the time went on I noticed the breeze, which had been just enough to keep the temperature very pleasant, began to stiffen. Pretty soon it was nearing the "make sure your hat is on firmly" level. It kept getting stronger. We had a beach umbrella up and the wind got to the place where it was so strong it inverted the umbrella. Still the wind increased. We saw flotation devices people had on the beach getting blown away. Then it was body boards flying away in the wind. At that point the wind was picking the sand up off the beach and blowing it at considerable velocity. So there we were, hoping for a nice relaxing time at the beach and we're just getting sandblasted. It began to get painful. That's when we said, "Enough of this." By the time we headed back to the car it was quite an adventure to just get there and put stuff away without it flying away. Michael had to protect his truck from flying boogie boards that came at it like missiles.

As we were driving home I reflected on how much like life that experience was. What we want our life to be like is a relaxing day at the beach. We have those moments when the storms go away and it finally seems to be turning to just what we were hoping for. Then the wind picks up and the next thing you know we're getting sandblasted and practically blown off the beach. Why is life so often like that? Today we're going to consider Job 13:15. It is one little verse that gives us some insight into why life is the way it is and how we can respond.

### JOB WAS SEVERELY TESTED

We are familiar with the story of Job. He experienced more pain than most of us can even imagine. Whatever you think would be the most extreme adversity, the worst loss, the most painful experience, Job had it. He went through it all, and it all hit him as a package, blowing up his life in one big, horrific explosion.

In her book *It Had To Be A Monday*, Jill Briscoe wrote, “I know that in my experience I do a halfway decent job of trusting the Lord until something touches one of our children. In a way, our children are my Achilles’ heel, and Satan knows it!” I can totally relate to this. My deepest fears are that something terrible will happen to one of our children. Job had a parent’s worst nightmare. All of his children died. What would be most fearful and difficult for you? Whatever it is, Job had it all. He lost all of his wealth, all of his children died, and then he became miserably ill. In Job 2:9 his wife said to him, “Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die.”

That sounds really bad and Mrs. Job comes off looking like she’s kicking the poor man when he’s about as down as a person could ever be. However, I don’t think it’s quite as bad as it sounds. Remember that she too has suffered horribly. She’s a mother who has lost all of her children and she’s reeling from that devastating loss. Laurie and I lost one child. The thought of losing another would be way too much to bear. She lost them all. In chapter 2 she watched the man she loved contract a horrible disease that made him utterly miserable. I think she can’t take his suffering any more. She had no palliative for him and no cure for him, and she thinks the only hope for him is for his suffering to end permanently. So she thinks the only way to end the misery is to curse God so God will take him.

Job did not deserve all the awful things that happened to him. In Job 1:9 the Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.” This was a truly godly man and his life turned as bad as it possibly could. We typically think if we’re really good and we serve God he will reward us with all the good things in life. Well it didn’t work out for Job.

Job teaches us a crucial lesson. No matter how blessed you are, no matter how close to God you are, no matter how obedient to God you are, you are going to experience adversity in this world. This is true for two reasons: we live in evil world and we have an enemy.

Imagine that you take a friend who has never been to a water park to Aquatica, the Sea World park. Your friend sees the various rides and says, “Those look like a lot of fun. I’d like to go on them but I don’t want to get wet.” Um, excuse me, but you are at a water park. Wa-ter-park. You cannot go on a water ride and not get wet. So here’s the bad news. According to the Bible Satan is now the god of this age. This world has been profoundly impacted by the fall and by his influence. Through his efforts there is now pain, suffering and death in this world. It is evil world. You live in ev-il-world. There is no way that you are going to miss out on evil in evil world. You will not avoid pain and suffering any more than you can avoid death.

On top of that you have an enemy on the loose, one who wants to ravage your life. Look at Job 1:9-11. God had boasted of Job's great loyalty and character to Satan. Satan says, "Does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has and he will surely curse you to your face." Do you see what Satan thinks? He thinks the only reason anyone would worship and serve God is that God gives him what he wants. In other words, Satan believes fervently that if he makes life rough enough on anyone that person will curse God. Satan is convinced if he can just push the right button, hit you hard enough in the right place, you'll collapse like a house made of cardboard on a rainy day. So it's a pretty safe bet that you are in for some brutal attacks from the enemy.

You may think that my view of life is dour and pessimistic. I'm just telling you what God's Word says. 1 Peter 4:12 says, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you as though something strange were happening." You live in evil world. I cannot stress how utterly important it is for us to grasp this. If you do not when you experience painful adversity you will question God. You will believe he has abandoned you. Your faith may shatter. You need to be prepared and not be surprised by the adversity of life.

#### JOB DISPLAYED FAITH AND PERSEVERANCE

In Job 1:21 after tearing his robe and shaving his head as symbols of his grief he 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." What a profound statement of faith. That verse was the inspiration for one of my favorite songs, *Blessed Be The Name of The Lord*.

But Job wasn't done. After standing firm in the midst of his grief Job was hit yet again with misery. This time it was his health that was taken away. That's when his wife chimed in with "curse God and die." Once again Job astounds us with his faith. In Job 2:10 he replied, "Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?" In other words, should I expect that God will only allow good things in my life? The answer in his mind obviously was no. He would accept whatever God gave him.

Now we come to 13:15. Added to his misery has been the painful counsel of his friends. They started well, just sitting and grieving with him. Unfortunately after a week they were over the grieving. It was time to fix the problem. They felt they needed to help Job out by sharing with him their great wisdom. So one of them, Zophar, says in 11:5, "Oh how I wish that God would speak, that he would open his lips against you." Uh oh. He sort of telegraphed what was coming there. He assumed if God would speak it would be

to say something *against* Job. In other words, all this stuff that happened to Job was his fault because he was so bad. In verse 11 Zophar says, “Surely he (God) recognizes deceitful men; and when he sees evil, does he not take note?” In other words, God has seen through your holy disguise and knows how bad you really are, Job. In verses 14-15 he says, “If you put away the sin that is in your hand and allow no evil to dwell in your tent, then you will lift up your face without shame.” So repent of your sin and all these bad things will stop happening to you. This is all your fault.

Job knows this is all wrong. He knows he hasn’t done anything to deserve what happened to him. Yet he, too, is mystified by what God has let happen. Had God made a mistake? Was he asleep on his watch? Job is upset and confused over God’s will in this situation. He is frustrated and hurt by his friends. But despite all of this he did not waver in his faith. In verse 15 he says, “Though he slay me, yet I will hope in him.” Job was saying, “God can take away my family, he can take away my wealth, he can take away my health, he can even take away my very life, but I will **never** stop believing in him and putting my hope in him. **Nothing** will ever make me stop believing in him!

Job would be confused. He would hurt. He would feel mistreated. He would complain to God and would argue with God, but to his dying day he would keep believing in his God. In Job 17:6 Job said, “God has made me a byword to everyone, a man in whose face people spit.” Everyone in his society believed what Zophar and his colleagues believed. If really bad things happened to you it must be because you deserved it. So pretty much everyone Job encountered looked down on him and viewed him as cursed by God because he needed to be cursed. So in verse 7 he says, “My eyes grow dim with grief.” It sounds like he’s wallowing in his misery, about to stay down for the count. But in verse 9 he says, “Nevertheless, the righteous will hold to their ways, and those with clean hands will grow stronger.” He’s not giving up and he knows that somehow out of all of this he will end up stronger.

A few years ago I was done with work at the end of a summer day and was going to drive home. I got in my car and started the engine. As I did so a bee landed on the windshield right in front of my face. I said to him, “You’re not going to be there very long, little fellow.” I figured as soon as the car started moving he would be on his way. I put it in gear and drove to the parking lot entrance and he stayed right there. But I was about to turn onto a street on which I’d be driving 30 miles per hour. That bee was just sitting on glass. It is slick. There was nothing for him to hang onto. Plus, why would he want to? It’s not like he was getting nectar from a flower or something. It was just hard glass. I said, “Sorry, dude, but when we start going you’re going to be hit with what amounts to a 30 mile per hour wind and you’re not going to be able to hang on.” I turned on to the street and started driving and that little bee stuck right there in front of my face. I got to the freeway entrance. My little friend was about to be blown away. I accelerated up the on ramp, 40 miles per hour, 50 miles per hour, 60 miles per hour, and he stuck right on

my windshield. Now it was becoming a problem because I was getting on the freeway and should be looking at traffic around me, but my eyes were riveted on that dumb bee. As I hit 65 I could see his little wings vibrating like mad as his little body was being buffeted by what had to be for him a violent wind, but he didn't budge. Now it was a challenge. I have no idea why it was so important to that little creature to stay right there on my windshield but it was like he was challenging me. I took the challenge. I hit 70, and he was still there. 75 and he was still hanging in there. I couldn't give up. Fortunately before I hit 80 or got a speeding ticket suddenly he was blown away.

Ever since that day I've thought of that guy as "Tenacious Bee." He simply would not give up. He hung on for all he was worth. He was like Job. Job was battered and buffeted by hurricane force winds of disaster over but nothing would ever make him let go. He never gave up despite more adversity than anyone we have ever known. He stayed faithful. "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him." That's what we need to deal with adversity.

## IMPLICATIONS

### PERSEVERANCE IS ESSENTIAL WHEN WE FACE ADVERSITY

What if Job had not persevered, if he said, "I've tried to serve God and look where it got me. Either there is no God to trust, or God is cruel and undeserving of my respect. So either way, I'm done with him." What would have been the impact of his life? Zero. We are encouraged and inspired by him because when he had every reason to give up on God he said, "Even if he kills me I will still put my hope in God." That inspires everyone. If Job was rich, his kids were fine and his life was perfect until the day he died would he have had any impact on the world? Not really. We certainly would never have heard of him. He has had impact specifically because of the adversity he experienced and the faith and endurance he displayed in the face of it.

James 1:2 says, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds." Please note that he did not write, "Consider it pure joy *if* you ever face trials." Think about the difference between when and if. Imagine that you have just gotten settled in your seat on an airplane and the flight attendants are now going through their little speech. Then imagine they say, "When the aircraft loses cabin pressure, oxygen masks..." Wait, what? When it loses pressure? That's a very different thing from "If the cabin should lose pressure."

By saying "when you encounter trials" James is reminding us of what we have already seen. Trials and adversity are not an "if." They are a when. They are not an occasional shocking aberration from your normal peaceful existing floating gently down the stream. This is how life is. You will encounter various forms of adversity that range in intensity from minor annoyance to cursing the day you were born. In fact, life is a series of

challenges. You are either in one now, you've just come through one, or you're about to face one. We have no choice about whether we face trials, we only have choice about how we respond to them.

Proverbs 24:16 is one of Laurie's favorite verses. It says, "For though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again. Why seven times? You probably already know. Back in the day Proverbs was written, 7 was the number of perfection or completion. So this is talking about total failure. This is falling as thoroughly and as often as it is possible to imagine. The quality of the righteous person is that he is not defeated by what appears to be epic fail. He gets back up again and keeps going. He perseveres.

I recall watching Toby learn how to surf when he was young. We took him and his friends to the beach many times. He fell seven times, meaning he fell to the max. I remember thinking he would never master that sport. It was fail, fail, fail, fail, fail fail day after day. But he never gave up. And the result is today he is an accomplished surfer. Anything worth doing will involve perseverance. It will involve failing and falling and refusing to give up. Are we willing to have that same kind of perseverance in the face of the inevitable trials of life?

## PERSEVERANCE REQUIRES MORE THAN GRITTING OUR TEETH

### ***Remember the importance of perseverance***

James 1:3-4 says, "the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." The testing of your faith is adversity. We only learn to persevere when we face it. I don't really have to persevere in sitting on a beautiful tropical beach. James says it is only through persevering through hardship that we become mature and complete.

Laurie and I were on a walk and were talking about perseverance one time. I mentioned this idea that perseverance is key to maturity. She said, "What if someone doesn't care about spiritual maturity? What if all they care about is being happy and getting what they want?" That's a really good question. There are a lot of people who live in that camp, and even those of us who believe in Jesus, actually struggle with the fact that we mostly want to be happy and comfortable here. Adversity is not happy nor is it comfortable. Maybe we'd prefer comfortable and immature to adversity and maturity.

Please note carefully what James said. He said it is only by persevering through adversity that we become mature and complete. The word "complete" could be translated, "whole." In other words, you only become mature and have a whole or sound soul by persevering through adversity. If you don't, you will have a sick soul. Do you want to have a sick soul? No one wants that. Though we don't often think it, the truth is that we all long for a healthy soul. If your soul is sick no matter how good your circumstances might be, you

will not be at peace and won't be truly joyful. And if your soul is healthy no matter how bad your circumstances might be you can still be at peace and still be healthy.

Fame cannot make your soul healthy. That's why so many famous people end up in rehab centers and are cash cows for therapists. Money cannot make your heart whole. Neither can success or power or good looks. Only being spiritually mature by persevering through adversity as you trust God continually can accomplish that.

There is an obvious physical corollary. I want to have a healthy body. All right, here's what you do. You want it to feel good, right? Yes. Well avoid exertion at all costs because that feels bad. Eat donuts for breakfast, pizza for dinner and ice cream and cake for dessert because that tastes and feels wonderful. It truly is comfort food. Have some potato chips while you're watching television. Will you have a healthy body? That would be a definite no. All right, I want to get healthy, so today I will exercise, eat oatmeal for breakfast, forego the sweets and eat only fish and vegetables. So I've done that for a day, am I good to go? No, the only way you get truly physically strong and healthy is to keep going. It is by persevering in exercise and good nutrition. When you stop you become less healthy. And so it is spiritually. Remember you want a healthy soul, and the only way to get it is by staying faithful day after day no matter what happens.

I am probably going to annoy some people by saying this, but if you pay attention to what James said you will see that all the discipleship programs in the world will never make you mature and complete. The only thing that will do that is persevering through adversity. So we need to remember when we face adversity that enduring it with faith is the key to creating a whole, strong soul in us, and that is a necessary component of having a joyful life.

### ***Give up fairness***

God is just so what happens in the world should be just, right? Well that's where Job's friends got into trouble. They tried to make what happens in this world be fair. If, when Job experienced such awful trials, he deserved it, that would only be fair. Therefore Job had to be really bad, didn't he? Somehow the equation broke down.

Ecclesiastes 8:14 says there was something that really bothered the writer of that book. "There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: the righteous who get what the wicked deserve, and the wicked who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, is meaningless." In other words, the equation doesn't work. It's not fair. Bad people have good things happen and good people get the reverse. It's not always that way, but it happens way too often.

One of our struggles is we want life to balance out. I believe in Jesus. I try to be faithful to him. So shouldn't that be rewarded? Shouldn't it work out in my favor in this world?

Well how did that work for Job? It didn't. You couldn't find a better, more faithful person than him. And he got the mother of raw deals.

Unfortunately our view of "fair" is distorted at best. We are no better than kids who so often object "that's not fair." Fair means they get what they want and it means much the same for us. But a bigger issue is that God's just equation only balances in eternity. If you leave eternity out you will get it wrong. This is important because when we focus on fairness we are really focusing on self. When we do that we will likely end up feeling short-changed. We will be left with only self-pity and bitterness. The only way to persevere is to let go of our need to see the reward in this life and to trust that God will indeed be just in the eternal long run.

### ***Keep A Clear Focus***

I heard a researcher say that two of the most excruciating pains humans experience are passing a kidney stone and passing a baby, in other words, giving birth. I will never do that second one, hope I never do the first either. But think about the difference between those two experiences. Passing a kidney stone is the result of some kind of malfunction. Something has gone wrong in the system and there is no real point to it other than to get through it. People have experienced it typically say, "I'd give anything to never go through that again."

Giving birth is not a malfunction. It is a purposeful act. It is creative and literally life giving. It produces something wonderful. Rumor has it that pain is as bad as it gets, yet because of what it produces women who have suffered through it actually consider going through it again. They often say, "I'm ready to have another one." No one ever says, "I'm ready to have another kidney stone." The difference is one pain is something one must merely endure to survive, while the other has a glorious purpose. That's what makes all the difference.

One of the most powerful aids to endurance in the face of adversity is having a purpose in it. If we are focused on something meaningful coming from it we will far more willingly endure. Job had that. Back in Job 2:9 after Job's health failed his wife asked him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity?" The word integrity seems a bit odd there to me. We think of integrity mostly as being honest or really moral. But what does that have to do with whether Job would "curse God and die" as she suggested? That statement makes us think his integrity has something to do with God. The Hebrew word meant simplicity or wholeheartedness. It meant to have an undivided heart. So Job's wife asked, "Are you still keeping your heart undivided?"

Job had an undivided heart. He was wholehearted. Well what was he wholehearted about? In Job 16:9 Job expressed his desire that God would just finish him off. Just end his suffering. Then in verse 10 he said, "Then I would still have this consolation – my joy



in unrelenting pain—that I had not denied the words of the Holy One.” Job’s unrelenting joy, the thing he cared about most of all in this world, was that he would honor God. That’s what he wanted his life to be about.

When you are facing adversity, when you are in what feels to you like unbearable pain, what do you want your life to be about? The thing that can give us strength, enable us to persevere, is when we focus with laser intensity on this one idea. I want God to be honored by whom I am, what I say, what I think and what I do. That’s what matters most of all to me.

The book of Job has a hugely important message that sometimes gets lost. Why did all of those awful things happen to Job? It wasn’t random suffering and it wasn’t karma. It wasn’t God judging him. Far from it. There is a message here about what is going on in the world. It is something we typically don’t see because we see through a glass darkly. There is a mighty struggle going on in creation. God is all powerful so he could instantly vaporize any opponent, but all that would do is prove that he is strong and powerful. That should already be evident. God is in the process of proving something else.

In his book, *The Gospel According To Job* (p. 32), Mike Mason wrote, “God’s omnipotence...is never in question in this fight. Like it or not, even Satan is compelled to bow before the throne of God. But what is being disputed in...the battle on earth is God’s moral *right* to omnipotence.” In other words, is God just and does he have the right to rule and have his will be done? Philip Yancey wrote in the book, *Disappointment With God*, that Job was blameless and innocent. “Why then is Job suffering? Not for punishment. Far from it—he has been selected as the principal player in a great contest of the heavens.”

When you experience trial and adversity, you are on center stage. The spotlight is on you. At stake is the greatest of all battles. All of creation is watching. Will you, by your response, by your faith and perseverance, say God is just, God is good, and he is the rightful ruler of all, God is to be praised, I will serve him and love him no matter what happens? Or will you fold and with Satan say that God is unfair and not to be trusted and certainly not loved?

Laurie and I went out to a restaurant. We were told we would have to wait 45 minutes for a table. We went for a walk and came across another restaurant that had a similar menu. We considered going there instead. The hostess was very enthusiastic about the place. Laurie asked a key question. "Whats your favorite item on the menu?" She said, "Well I am a vegan so I don't eat the food here." We went back to the first restaurant. When we face adversity and start doubting we can trust God we are recommending him but not eating the food ourselves.

I have something to prove. It's not about me. It's about God. The whole purpose of my life is to prove that God is worthy of my allegiance no matter what, he is worthy of love and praise no matter what, because he is always good, merciful, wise and just.

### ***Look To Jesus***

See him as the sovereign Lord who rules and does good for us in all things. We must see him as the ruler who was able to actually use the horror and injustice of the cross as the key component of his scheme to bring ultimate good for all of us. Look to him as the Sovereign Lord in all things.

Romans 15:5 describes God as “the God who gives endurance and encouragement. Jesus knew what faced him the night before he died. He asked that if possible he might not have to go through with it. But then he submitted to the Father. The Father gave him the strength to stay faithful through the worst experience any human has ever endured.

Paul, in his efforts to carry out the mission God had given him went through years of hardship, persecution and abuse. But he described God as the God who gives endurance and encouragement. How did he know that? He had been given that endurance and encouragement by God. Have you ever read about the difficulties Paul went through and wondered how he did it? Have you ever thought he must have been stronger than you, cut from a different cloth? He was human just like us. He had fears and vulnerabilities just like we do. He hurt just like us. But he was given the strength to endure by God.

1 Corinthians 10:13 says, “No temptation<sup>[a]</sup> has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted<sup>[b]</sup> beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted,<sup>[c]</sup> he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.” God is faithful, he will give you the strength to endure if you ask.

Tony Dungy, former Super Bowl winning head coach, relates a story that verifies this in his book, *Quiet Strength* (p. 256). Trent Dilfer, a former quarterback in the NFL who also won a Super Bowl, is another follower of Jesus. Trent and his wife went through the parents' nightmare of the death of their 5 year old son, Trevin. In his book Dungy says, “I remember calling Trent and telling him that we were praying for him...I told him I was certain I wouldn't be able to handle the death of a child with the kind of grace and courage Trent had shown. His answer was immediate and direct. You could, Coach, if you had to. The Lord will give you the strength at that time to go through it.” Dungy wasn't sure about that, but he found out. Several years later his own son, Jamie, committed suicide. It was horrifying, but Dungy wrote, “When Jamie died I realized that Trent was right. God's strength is sufficient.” God gave him the ability to endure even the thing he thought impossible. As we look to him he will give us the ability to endure whatever adversity we face as well.