

## THE CRAZY MAN'S SONG

3rd in a Series on the Pandemic  
Job 1

Our daughter in law, Anna, sent us a story she had seen on line. It happened at a grocery store at 7:45 in the morning. The store was to open at 8 with an hour reserved for senior citizens to shop. There was a line of seniors outside the door waiting for it to open when a young man arrived and tried to cut in to the front of the line. An elderly woman objected loudly and began whacking him with her cane. He retreated to avoid injury. But then he tried again, and this time an older man stopped him and actually punched him in the stomach. Again he backed off. But this young man was not to be denied. He started for the front of the line again when several of the seniors stood in his way. Finally he said, "Look, if you don't let me get to the door and unlock it, nobody is getting into the store."

How drastically and quickly life has changed. I was remembering this week a time when our kids were in their teenage years and some of their friends came over during the night and strung toilet paper all over our front yard. Toilet paper! Can you believe such a wasteful use of that precious resource ever happened? I'm pretty sure nobody's toilet papering anybody's house these days. You might as well be draping gold jewelry on someone's property. Actually it is worse than that. You can still buy gold jewelry in lots of stores, but just try finding some toilet paper to buy. Good luck. I was a bit amused to have a story show up on my phone that included a toilet paper usage calculator. Until recently could you ever have imagined such a thing? Great, now I can figure out the day we're going to run out of toilet paper. That way I can plan ahead and maybe go out on a busy street corner holding a sign that says, "Will work for toilet paper." What is with all the hoarding? Don't you think if someone felt they needed 96 rolls of toilet paper just to get through a couple of weeks of quarantine, they had a problem they should have already seen a doctor about?

This pandemic thing is really getting old, isn't it? I found myself thinking this week that I just want it to stop. I want it to go away. I want someone to say, "All right, the worst is over. Things will be getting better now and in a couple of weeks we should be back to normal. Baseball is going to start again, and very soon if you want to go out to a restaurant to eat you'll have your choice of restaurants. But we haven't heard that yet, have we? And we don't know when we will hear it. One

natural response to something this bad is to ask why. Many people are disoriented by this. How are we supposed to understand it? How bad is this going to get? And why is this happening? Why is God allowing this pandemic to spread sickness, death and fear all over the world? And why is he allowing it to introduce what is likely more suffering from the economic fallout that is bound to follow? There are an awful lot of people already out of work, fretting over how they are going to pay their bills, and we don't even know what the long term effect will be. We just know it's not going to be good.

In fact, every time something awful happens to innocent people, especially to us, the question of why lurks in there. Today we are going to look at a person who went through the worst life can dump on someone, a man whose name is almost synonymous with suffering. His experiences were recorded to help us, to encourage us, to give us perspective during seasons of upheaval and hardship. Seasons like one we are in right now. From his response we will learn some things that can help us deal with our circumstances. Let's look at Job 1.

### JOB WAS AN IMPRESSIVE MAN

Many scholars believe the book of Job is the oldest one in the Bible. Job probably lived 4000 years ago. He lived in a place called Uz. Not Oz, but Uz. We don't know exactly where that was, except it was in the Middle East somewhere. Some scholars believe it was in the Wadi Sirhan, which is a plain in southeastern Jordan stretching into Arabia.

Job was a wealthy man with huge herds of sheep, camels, oxen and donkeys. Verse 3 says, "he was the greatest man among all the people of the East." He was a man of wealth and influence. He had a large family of 10 kids. He was the wizard of Uz. He was truly successful. But he was impressive for another reason as well. He is described in verse 1 as blameless and upright. He feared God and shunned evil. He had the finest character and was a man of great faith. Even God says of him that there was no one else like him.

The fact that Job was wealthy, influential and godly serves as a reminder to us that hardship and tragedy befall all of us. Money, power, even godliness cannot and do not exempt us.

### JOB HAD NO IDEA WHAT WAS REALLY HAPPENING

Beginning in Job 1:6 we see some things happening in the spiritual realm, things that Job never knew about. In the New Testament we are told that there is a

spiritual war going on. We have difficulty remembering that because we don't see it. We do see its effects in the physical world at times, and when it is extreme we will sometimes think, "Oh, right. This is happening because there is a spiritual battle going on." But it is easy to forget about that battle because we can't see it happening.

The writer of Job's story gives us a peak behind the curtain. It wasn't physical violence, but it was a part of the spiritual battle. Satan comes into the presence of God after he has been out in the world running amok and causing trouble. God says to him, "While you've been roaming around the world causing trouble, did you happen to run into my servant, Job?" He then says there's no one on the planet like him. He reiterates that Job is blameless and upright and fears God.

Satan responds in verses 9-10, "Does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has?" In other words, of course Job worships you. You give him everything he could ever want. He knows which side of the bread the butter is on. Who wouldn't love you if you make sure that his life is sweet?

Satan is implying that the only reason anyone would love God and worship him is because they know that worshipping him is the key to health and wealth. So the innuendo is, just take away all the goodies you give him and watch what happens. He'll turn on you like a rabid dog. There's no way in heaven that Job will serve you if you mess up his sweet life.

Satan said that because it is what he thinks. He can't imagine anyone ever serving and worshipping God without being bought off. He wouldn't! And he is so full of himself that he cannot imagine anyone, least of all a mere human being, worshipping God without an awful lot of perks to make it palatable.

Summer jobs were difficult to come by when Jerry graduated from high school, followed by his younger brother two years later. Both of us had a brief experience working in the "sheds." Jerry worked for a short time at a potato shed and I worked for a shorter time at a carrot shed. The shed is where produce is brought from growers to be packaged and put on trains to be transported to market. This was grunt work. It was messy and hard. And this was in Bakersfield, in the summer. Sheds are not air conditioned. So it was 190 degrees. Another 22 degrees and we'd have been at the boiling point. If you'll excuse the expression, these were not plum jobs. They were jobs young people with no experience and no special skills could sometimes get. These were not entry level jobs because they'd have had to get

better to be entry level. So here's the question. Would you apply for that job if they didn't offer any pay for doing it? Would you do it just out of the goodness of your heart or because you had an altruistic desire to help people by ensuring fresh produce got to their markets? Absolutely not. You would do those jobs purely because of the monetary award. That's how Satan saw worshipping God.

Um, Rick, are you equating doing a crummy job at a place just a couple of exits down the freeway from hell to knowing and serving God? Well, no, but that's kind of how Satan saw it. Knowing and serving God was less appealing to him than shoveling rotten potatoes out of a bin in a million degree heat.

Satan, being a total narcissist, assumes that everyone is like him. He could not even imagine a person choosing to serve God just because God is worthy of service. No, the only reason anyone would serve God is if God bought him off. It would probably be helpful for people who are steeped in the health and wealth gospel to notice that they have essentially bought into that same theology. Hey, God knows the only reason you'll worship him is that it pays off in this world. Worship him and you'll get health and wealth. If you don't get that then no one would buy into this deal. It's a good idea to remember where that thinking came from.

So all Satan figured he had to do was make people, Job included, think God wasn't sweetening the deal enough and they would run out of there faster than they'd try to escape a building that was on fire. At the end of verse 11 he says of Job, "Stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face."

To our shock, God says, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your power." In other words, I'm removing the hedge. You think you can beat him enough so that he breaks and curses me? Go ahead and try."

### JOB'S LIFE BLEW APART

The result in Job's life was truly ugly. In short order all of Job's oxen were stolen, his sheep were killed, and then raiders came and stole all of his camels so his caravan business was ruined. One after another every bit of his great wealth was taken away. All of his servants were killed as well. That was bad, but worse was to come. All of his kids were at a party when something like a tornado hit. It ripped through the house at which the party was occurring and every one of his children were killed.

As you all know, Laurie and I went through the horror of the death of a child. I know several of you in our church have also been through that ordeal. I have never been able to adequately express how devastating the loss of a child is. I still can't. The experience changed us forever. Recently we were thinking about the threat of a possible economic meltdown as a result of the pandemic. There is a worst case scenario that we can see that could financially wipe out everyone in our family. I told Laurie that it would be awful if that happened. But that scary scenario could not compare with the death of our son. That was far worse. I don't really even like to think about how horrible painful that was.

Job went through that, times ten! I don't know how you could even survive losing ten children in one fell swoop. And that came on top of going through something worse than my worst case scenario for our current circumstances! His losses were literally inconceivable. There is no way we could ever truly comprehend the level of loss he experienced.

#### JOB RESPONDED BY WORSHIPING

What kind of response would you expect Job to have? Maybe curl up into the fetal position and no longer be able to function, just collapse in on himself. But if not, then he would have had a near terminal case of "Why me?" What happened to him was totally unfair. That could have led to unrelenting bitterness, anger at God and at the cruelty of life.

That's pretty much what we would expect. What we see in Job is totally different and it is remarkable. Job responds with the famous words, "Naked I came from my mothers' womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised." The last verse tells us that Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing. In other words, he didn't object that this was not fair, that God was being unjust in allowing such horror in his life.

Job acknowledges some fundamental truth. The first really is that we aren't owed anything in life. We come in naked, and we're going to go out the same way. Laurie many times has commented on the fact that in some ways we go out much as we came in. We have little hair at the end like many babies, we end up wearing diapers and we need someone to take care of us. Everything we have has been given to us. We don't earn life. We don't earn senses and abilities. So everything we have is a gift.

But the most profound and biggest thing Job said is "may the name of the Lord be praised." Later in 2:10 Job said, "Shall we accept good from God, and not

trouble?” If we only accept good from God that means that we expect to always have good. We are thinking we are owed something. Where do we get the idea that we deserve something? What makes us think that the norm of life is for everything to be good? Job takes the right path in saying no matter what happens, no matter what kind of circumstance may befall us, may the name of the Lord be praised. God is worthy of honor, no matter what happens. In fact, all of creation is designed and purposed to declare the glory of God. And so the right response is always to bring glory to God. So Job did the astounding thing of praising God even when his life was full of pain and loss. In so doing he proved that Satan was dead wrong. He proved that a person could see how good God is and choose to worship him regardless of circumstances.

## IMPLICATIONS

### WE WILL NOT ALWAYS UNDERSTAND WHAT'S HAPPENING

Job had no clue about why these horrible things happened to him. In fact, the rest of the book is a long debate about why these tragedies occurred. Job had 3 good friends who grieved with him. They struggled with why this had happened to their friend. They had a firm theology, and they applied logic to the situation. God is always just. He doesn't reward good with evil. But terrible evil had happened to Job. Therefore he must have done something awful to deserve this. If that were not true, then God would be unjust. Their theology was correct. God is always just. Their logic was correct. And their conclusion was still 100% wrong.

They pressed Job relentlessly to admit that he deserved what had happened to him. He defended himself, and in the process of doing so he began to question. Yeah, God, you're supposed to be just, but I don't deserve this. So it looks to me like you're not treating me right. In the end God shows up to answer him. But the answer he gives is not to explain the why. His answer was to say, “Job, are you God? Can you create worlds? Can you create life?” So in Job 42:3 Job says to God, “Surely I spoke of things I did not understand.” In other words, oops, I didn't know what I was talking about. In 42:5 he said, “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.”

Job knew some things about God. He said he had heard about him. But in the process of working through the disasters of his life he came to see God as he really is. And he realized that questioning and accusing God was a huge mistake. He realized God operates on a totally different plane than we do. He saw that God is majestic, just, good, holy and loving. His character never wavers. So Job realized

he needed to trust God's character and praise him, even when he could not see immediate evidence of that character in his circumstances.

There is an unfortunate reality that we need to come to grips with. At some point in life we all will stand in Job's sandals. Great griefs, losses and enormous disappointments are going to happen to all of us. We live in a fallen, broken world, not heaven. The inevitable consequence of that is we are going to take some painful hits.

In Romans 8:22 Paul said, "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time." I was reading an article about the corona virus that discussed the fact that men are more susceptible to it than women. In fact, by Tuesday in San Diego County there were almost twice as many cases of it hitting men than women. The article said that this was not unusual, that in many of the viral epidemics men are harder hit than women. Then the article made a truly sexist comment. It said that the reason men are harder hit is that men's immune systems are weaker than those of women. I was offended. How dare the author say such a thing? Well, he dared say it because it's true! It has been suggested that it is possible that estrogen might boost immune systems.

Oh, great. That's not fair. My wife has a stronger immune system than me. Sheesh. She might be asking for my man card any day now. So that seems, guys, like maybe we've been given a raw deal. But if you think that I have one word for you. Childbirth. From where I stand, the pains of childbirth actually start 9 months before a baby is born. Pregnancy, at least in our family, is an ordeal, and a lot of groaning goes on. Both Anna and Carissa have had really stressful, painful, uncomfortable pregnancies all the way through with lots of groaning. And then comes the birthday. Yikes. That experience is a whole lot of fun. Isn't there a better system than this for bring new life into the world. Groaning is a generous word for what goes on. Yeah, uh, give me that puny immune system any day over going through that.

Paul says we should envision that groan-filled birth process. That's what creation is experiencing right now. It's ugly, and it's no fun at all. So here's the key question. Are you part of creation? I'll give you a hint. The answer is yes. So what will you be experiencing in this world? Groaning. In the next verse Paul says that explicitly. Romans 8:23, "Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship." We are groaning, because this world is not as it should be. Because it is hard, because troubles are a part of life for everyone in this broken world. You could be the most

upright, noble, godly person on the planet in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and you're still going to groan because of the travails of this life. Health and wealth, my eye. Where do people get such stupidity? Just read the book, will you?

So what are we supposed to do? We are supposed to remember that God knows infinitely more than we, that he is always good, and that love is his motive in everything he does. We must remember that we are not always going to understand what he allows in life. Romans 11:33 says, "Oh the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out." We can't trace out where God goes. His paths are beyond our knowledge. So Paul asks in the next verse, "Who has known the mind of the Lord?" The implied answer is, "No one."

This is a hard time for Laurie and me because we have been suddenly cut off from our children and our grandchildren. Our son, Toby, who has seen the corona virus face to face, is very insistent that we not be with our beloved family for now. In particular he says this disease is a threat to me because I have a puny male immune system, and I'm old. Worry about me, Citizen, I'm Elderly Man. That makes me corona bait. Unfortunately Toby is exposed to this disease in his job. Michael has been out in public as he has to pilot 757 airplanes. And Toby is concerned that this disease could be picked up by him or Michael, transmitted to the kids, and ultimately on to us. So in effect, we are quarantined from our kids and grandkids. This has been hard for us. It is also very hard on Ella and Cara. They love being with Nana and Yapaw. When we are with them Cara often will cry just because Laurie leaves the room. And every time they are at our house when it is time to go Ella cries because she doesn't want to leave. And now her parents have told her she can't see Nana and Yapaw, and it may be for many weeks. They have explained to her that it is because of a sickness. Ella doesn't really understand what's going on. She has learned that the sickness is the corona virus. But this is beyond her ability to grasp. She also doesn't understand what it has to do with the lack of toilet paper. The bottom line is Ella and Cara can't comprehend what is happening in the world. Something they don't want is happening to them, and all they can really do is trust that Mom and Dad are doing what is best because they love them. And that's exactly where we are with the Lord. That's where Job was.

Laurie and I used to love the TV show *Castle*. In it the two main characters were Richard Castle, a best selling crime novelist, and Kate Beckett, a homicide detective. In the course of the show they fall in love with each other. There was one episode in which evidence appears to implicate Castle in a murder. Quickly Castle realizes he is in trouble and goes into hiding. But the more evidence that is



discovered the stronger the case against him appears to be. The evidence seems irrefutable. Beckett even wonders if it is true. But Beckett eventually comes through and helps Castle. She didn't do it because of the evidence. She did it because she knew him. She knew his character and that he would never do what he was accused of. In the end she was proven correct as the whole thing was an elaborate frame job pulled off by a master criminal. We are dealing with the master of all criminals, and he's trying to frame God himself. What we must learn to do is trust the character of God. We know who God is. We know he is good and loving. So even though the events are beyond our comprehension, we trust him and we say, "May the name of the Lord be praised."

But, still, why would God allow such disruptions, such threats as this virus? Well, remember that we live in a broken world. The virus is a natural consequence of that just as earthquakes, tornadoes, mosquitoes, rattlesnakes and sharks are. But I can give you two reasons. I was reminded of the first earlier this year when I read a lengthy article from the *New York Times* about the problems of the Boeing 737 Max. The article clearly explained the bad mistakes Boeing made. But in the end the by far largest factor in the two fatal crashes was a failure of airmanship. With all the mistakes by Boeing, the crashes should have been avoided, all that was needed was for the pilots to flip one simple switch off, and it should have quickly occurred to them. The author made the point that pilots trained by our military are the best in the world because the military trains them to fly their aircraft to their very limits. In so doing it makes them much more capable airmen. It hit me that God kind of does the same thing with us. He trains us to stretch the limits, and that happens in stressful, difficult circumstances. The second reason has to do with what the scoreboard of life is really about. Let me explain.

#### WE MUST REMEMBER WHAT'S GOING ON BEHIND THE SCENES

One crucial piece of information shows up in this passage. It is that what's really at stake in what's happening in this world is the glory of God. In his book, *The Gospel According To Job*, 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." Is he really fair, is he really good? Satan claims he is not, and he's doing everything he can to prove that. That's what it is all about. It is not about whether we are happy and comfy.

What we need to know is that the most important thing we can do is to declare the holiness, goodness, justice and love of God. This is really what is ultimately at

stake in the spiritual war. We have been given the chance to play a huge role in this cosmic conflict. When we stand with Job and say, “the Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord” we are scoring a huge victory. This is most important when it feels to us like we have no evidence of God’s goodness and justice in our immediate circumstances.

In his book, *Jesus, Hero Of Thy Soul*, Jim McGuigan wrote that Job “is the proof that God can be loved because he is himself and not just a cosmic meal ticket.” Behind the scenes where we cannot see, all that is going on is aimed at one thing, revealing and proving again the glory, the goodness and justice of God.

I used to serve at a much larger church where many hundreds of people attending services. That created a situation where there were people who knew me, whom I did not know. It was not uncommon to be out in the community and have someone I didn’t recognize at all greet me by name. This resulted in a couple of awkward moments. I remember being in a restaurant at a table when some people came in. They looked right at me, smiled and waved. I didn’t know who they were, but I didn’t want them to feel offended by not acknowledging them. Then they walked in our direction. I prepared to say hello to them when they walked right past our table and joined their friends at the table sitting behind us. I completely misunderstood the situation and ended up looking like a big doofus. We make that same mistake in life. We think it is about us. About life being good, enjoyable, safe and relatively painless. If we live that way we will end up with our whole life looking like a doofus life. That’s not what it’s about. It’s about proving that God is so glorious he is worthy of our love, our devotion, our praise, our worship no matter what happens.

#### WE MUST ALWAYS PRAISE GOD

Job’s wife couldn’t understand his response to his situation. In chapter 2 it gets even worse. He loses his health as well as his wealth. She says to him, “Why don’t you curse God and die?” But Job refused to do that. He continued to trust and praise God. Praising God is always the win.

In Psalm 34:1 David wrote, “I will extol the Lord at all times, his praise will always be on my lips.” Job did what David said he would do, extol the Lord at all times. Surely if there was ever a time when one would not praise God, it was after Job’s life exploded. But Job said even then, may the name of the Lord be praised. David also lived that out. At the beginning of Psalm 34 there is a note about its origin. It says, “Of David. When he pretended to be insane before Abimelech.”

The story is familiar. King Saul was losing his grip on reality, and in his paranoia decided that David was a threat to him. Twice he tried to kill David before David realized he needed to escape. He ran away, but Saul would not give up easily. He kept pursuing him. There was nowhere in Israel that was safe for David.

Fearing for his life and desperate to get away David decided he could not stay in Israel. So he went to the Philistine city of Gath. Saul could not reach him there because it was enemy territory outside of Saul's control. There was, however, one flaw with this plan. When David got to enemy territory the king of that area was named Achish, and according to 1 Samuel 21:11 his aides said to him, "Isn't this David, the king of the land? Isn't he the one they sing about in their dances, 'Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands'?" The tens of thousands he had killed were Philistines. David was a famous Philistine killer now in Philistine territory.

David had just jumped out of the frying pan and landed squarely into the fire. 1 Samuel 21:12-13 says, "David took these words to heart and was very much afraid of Achish, king of Gath. So he pretended to be insane in their presence; and while he was in their hands he acted like a madman, making marks on the doors of the gate and letting saliva run down his beard."

David was so desperate he hid out among his enemies and had to pretend he had lost his mind, scratching at gates and drooling all over himself, probably babbling nonsense. It was in that context that David wrote, "I will extol the Lord at all times, his praise will always be on my lips." David was singled out by God, chosen above all others to be the next king of Israel. Yet he had no place safe to go, and the only way he could protect himself was to seek refuge with his enemies and pretend to be a nut job, to completely humiliate himself. Where was God? Why was he letting this happen to him? Why wasn't God fulfilling his promise to make him king? David didn't have any answers to those questions, but he chose to praise God anyway.

As part of our shelter in place plan Laurie and I started a jigsaw puzzle. This one was a really cool beach scene painting and it consisted of 1000 pieces. We have spent parts of the last 3 weeks on it. We sort of finished it this week. I say we sort of finished it because we put in all the pieces we had. Unfortunately, we have it on a board, and we had to move that board around to different places over the past few weeks. Even though we were very careful, somehow in moving it we apparently lost a piece. We put in 999 of the 1000 pieces, but we can't find that last one. The job is not done, and what's really sad is it will never be done. I share that because

the story of Job tells us that the main task of our lives is to declare the praise of God, and especially to do it when we see no evidence of his goodness in our circumstances. If we don't do that our lives will never be complete. That's what they're about.

Here is the bad news. ***We can most powerfully accomplish that when there is zero evidence of God's goodness and love in our circumstances.*** When we only worship and love him when he puts a hedge around us and blesses our socks off, all we prove is we think like Satan. We'll only worship God if he buys us off.

It is in the time when life is most confusing, most difficult, darkest, that we most need to praise God. For when we do it we prove that we don't simply praise God because he gives us what we want. We praise him because he is worthy of praise, because we know he is holy, good, just and loving, even though we can't see it in our circumstances. We prove that Satan is completely wrong.