

5th, Sept, 2021.

Job19: 25-27,

Matthew13:44

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The Meaning of Suffering from the Book of Job

Hello, everyone! Today, I would like to find together the meaning of tribulation as seen from the book of Job. It is said that no book has had a greater impact on future generations than the book of Job. This is especially contributed in the fields of literature and philosophy. The reason for this is that the book of Job deals with "what God considers righteousness". This is a major issue for humankind, and Job's problem has always been a human problem. The overture, the debate with the three friends, Elihu's speech, God's word, Job's repentance and restoration of prosperity are the contents of this 42 chapter long book. The long book of Job seems to suggest that the troubles of life are so deep that they are not easily solved by human beings. In the end, we are reminded that there is no way to solve them except through an encounter with God (1).

I was suffering from family discord caused by my father's violence, the scars of my own divorce, difficulties in raising my children and in relationships with my siblings. Even now, the problems continue. In the midst of all this, I wanted to ask God to teach me the meaning of unreasonable hardships. For this reason, I decided to study at JTJ Missionary Seminary three years ago, starting in September 2018. I think that I was strongly convinced by the Holy Spirit that what I needed to do before I die was to study the Bible in its entirety. Especially at this time, right after my application for return to Canada was rejected, I was in despair and had cornered myself to the point where I thought if I could not find answers in the Bible, I was done.

That was when I studied the book of Job in seminary. The lecturer was Rev. Kazuji Kanematsu, a pastor of the Evangelical Alliance (Fukuin Doumei) who was about 80 years old. He was skinny and was devotedly taking care of his bedridden wife for many years. At first, he gave us a testimony. "I've had a heart disease since I was little and everyone in my family thought I could die at any moment. That's why they didn't object when I suddenly went to church, and they didn't object when I said I was going to be a pastor. The reason was that they didn't know when I would die, so they thought they should let me do what I wanted while I was alive. But I'm still alive until 80." In fact, he

looked very weak because of his long suffering. After I heard that powerful testimony, I instantly made up my mind that I would never miss one of his lectures. He seemed to me to be an expert on hardship. Thankfully, I've been blessed with many of his classes! Today I would like to share one of them with you.

The book of Job is spelled out in the middle of the Bible, so it is easy to misunderstand that it is newer in time, but Job was an ancient man, close to the time of Abraham. In Abraham's time, there was no law, and the formalities of faith had not yet been established. You could say it was the pioneer era of faith. In the time of Abraham, the father of faith, there was also "The Suffering of Job" (2).

Honestly, I had misunderstandings of the book of Job: I thought Job became famous because he was blessed twice as much after his hardship. But in my case, I have yet to receive a double blessing and still now the hardship continues. So I can't call my current reality a victory and I even felt ashamed as a Christian. And people around me would say, "Is there a problem with your faith?". I've been told that I suffered because of my karma (In ga ou hou in Buddhism), according to the thinking of the people around me. Even though it was difficult for me to understand why I experienced hardships for no reason. As a Christian myself, I have wondered what would I say to those who have been involved in crimes, accidents, and natural disasters, such as sudden illness, disabilities, disagreements with parents, victims of fraud, and victims of cult groups and so on. I thought that as a Christian, I should surely find an answer to this difficult question.

First of all, I want to reassure everyone. The Bible does not teach the idea of karma. This is the major theme of the book of Job. I don't want to get into this issue today, but I want to think together through the process of Job's spiritual growth. In the midst of his long suffering, Job met God and His Son, Jesus Christ. Amazing, isn't it? Job 1:8 says, "Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; who is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." What we can see from these words is that God loved Job and was very proud of him.

Job's fellowship with God gradually grew. There were three friends in the book of Job. Each of them came to Job with good intentions, but instead of comforting him, they blamed him for his misfortune because of his sin. It is really hard to be blamed by others in the midst of unreasonable hardship. I think Job was blaming himself as well. In Job 3:21, he lamented, "to those who long for death that does not come," It seems that he was

in a severe depression. At this level, he might take psychiatric medication and lose consciousness, I think he was in a dangerous state where daily life was too difficult, and if he was not careful, he would attempt suicide. That's true because he was separated from all his loved family and friends, and lost all his possessions, and his health. Besides, he was blaming himself, not to mention others and even himself. So, it's a state of anger added to grief. I think it was a painful situation that people who have never experienced it cannot understand it. Mrs. Sakie Yokota, who is active in creating a family association for the abductees of North Korea, became a Christian because she sympathized with the suffering of Job. There are other victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake in Japan, as well as those who are suffering because of the disasters that continue year after year, and also because of Covid19 now, and we can relate to Job's suffering.

But, at such a difficult time, God gave Job a spiritual consciousness. Job 9:32, 33 says, "He is not a man like me that I might answer him, that we might confront each other in court. If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both." Job was looking for an arbiter to stand between sinful man and God in the midst of his suffering. This mediator was Jesus Christ.

From here, Job's spiritual realization expanded further. Job 16:19-22 says, "Even now my witnesses is in heaven; my advocate is on high. My intercessor is my friend as my eyes pour out tears to God; on behalf of a man, he pleads with God as a man pleads for his friend." Job realized that the intercessor he had been seeking, Jesus Christ, was God on high in heaven. He realized that Jesus Christ would guarantee for him and stand by him even as his friends mocked him. Furthermore, he realized that Jesus Christ would intercede for him before God.

Romans 8:33, 34 says, "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died-more than that, who was raised to life-is at the right hand of God and is also interceding." Jesus Christ was crucified and resurrected for our sins. Because of His intercession, God credits us with righteousness even though we were sinners. We can be saved by simply believing this. Job was grateful for God's grace to forgive him without condemning him for his sins. That's wonderful.

Next, Job grew more spiritually. Job 19:25-27 says, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes-I, and

not another. How my heart yearns within me!" This passage had been interpreted slightly differently by scholars, but Job was able to realize the resurrection of Jesus Christ and even his own resurrection (3). Job was being told by God of what would happen about 2,000 years from that time. When I read this verse, I was very impressed. God loved Job, and He was revealing to Job His deepest plan in His heart. Hallelujah!

And that's not all. Job said that he would see God. Job was finally experiencing the presence of God, "seeing God" in his fellowship with God. Instead of looking at "the dust of the earth", which was full of problems. Job looked up to "heaven," which is the spiritual world where God is. Matthew 5:8 says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." The Bible teaches that those who are pure in heart can see God. If we have a pure heart, we may be taken advantage of by bad people and have a hard time in this world. However, God will show Himself to those who are pure in heart (4). Job's heart was strengthened and came to be pure more in the midst of his hardship and he was finally able to look up to God.

There was another person who had seen God who in heaven, in the midst of hardship. Acts 7:55-56, "But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look! ", he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right-hand of God." Stephen was persecuted for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, and at the moment of his death, the heavens were opened. At the height of his suffering, Stephen was able to see God and His Son Jesus Christ in heaven.

Through suffering, Christians can see God and Jesus Christ. It is a wonderful grace. It reminded me of a Christian movie that was popular when I was in Canada around 2014. I saw the movie, Heaven is for real, with my children and mother at a movie theater in New Westminster (5). Todd, a four-year-old boy, suddenly developed a high fever and he died. At that time, God took Todd to heaven. The testimony of a little boy who met Jesus Christ in heaven has encouraged Christians all over the world. However, I believe that Todd's testimony was more of an encouragement to his family than anything else. Todd's father was a pastor of a small church in rural US. Although he was a man, he had breast cancer. And he had kidney disease and many other illnesses. He couldn't live by the church's small gratuity, so he became a member of the local fire department and did physical labor despite his infirmity. However, he work hard to support the local people with his faith. For Todd's family, the death of their boy was a

painful experience like never before. But God has given them the gift of heaven. It is truly wonderful. I hope we can see heaven in our times of suffering. We also want to commune with God in a real way.

If you are wondering, "Why me? Why!" If you are going through a hardship that you don't know why, be proud of it because Job met Jesus Christ in the midst of a very unreasonable hardship without any wrong doing. Because in the midst of his hardship, Job was taught about God's grand plan of redemption. God is always present in our hardships. Be sure to meet Jesus Christ in the midst of your hardships. Jesus Christ is God who cannot be changed by any pleasures, honors, and riches of this world because He is eternal life.

As I prepared this message, I was reminded of these words. Matthew 13:44 says, "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field." I felt that the book of Job, which has 42 chapters, hides a treasure called Jesus Christ. I believe that Jesus Christ, like a treasure, is hidden in our hardships as well. I have come to believe that a life of faith is to cultivate the field of faith in order to obtain Jesus Christ even when there are hardships.

This is another testimony about a man who is both of a visually and hearing-impaired after being an adult. One of my friends had researched about the blind who had their disabilities after growing up. She said that they have more suffering than the blind from birth because they could see with their eyes before. But when the man got the chance to have a surgery that would improve his vision slightly, he refused it. The reason is like this. "I met Jesus Christ when I was blind, so I'm happy enough as it is." He found Jesus Christ like a treasure in the midst of his hardship.

So far, I have given you the main idea of the book of Job that I wanted to introduce to you. I hope it will be helpful to you when you read the book of Job on your own.

Let's pray.

Dear Heavenly Father! Thank you for today's message. Through Job, we found that hardship is a wonderful blessing to encounter God. If there are people who are in hardship right now, I pray that each one of us will be able to meet God. Free us from

sickness, financial problems, difficult relationships, legal disputes, natural disasters, Covid-19, and many other kinds of suffering. And please help us, the Holy Spirit, to grow spiritually in our daily fellowship with God. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Reference

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