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“Our Only Hope” **Sermon on Job :1, 2:1-10**

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There is a theology in the Bible that says, “Right living leads to a long, prosperous, healthy life.” Happy are they who delight in the law of the Lord. They are like trees planted by streams of water. In all they do, they prosper. But...

The wicked are not so....” The wicked perish.

There is a theology in the Bible that says, “The wicked die; the righteous prosper.” And I suppose the actuarial tables prove that true. If you keep your life between the lines, go to bed by ten, have a healthy diet, and know that a penny saved is a penny earned, chances are you will live a long and boring life.

The ancients looked around and saw that the law-abiding, church-going, diet-restricting, clean-handed, psalm-singing, alms-giving one was often the oldest one in the community. There is truth to that. I read a recent study that shows that those who attend church regularly also live longer, healthier, happier lives. So, keep those pledges coming. We’re trying to save your life here.

But, while the statistics say one thing, we also know that tragedy strikes out of nowhere, and no matter how much church you attend, how nice a person you are, and how carefully you live, good people can suffer.

We are about to read from the Book of Job. It is a make-believe, “once upon a time” story of a righteous, blameless, sinless man named Job who falls victim to a bet between Satan and God. The book of Job pokes holes in the biblical theology that says, “The righteous flourish.” Another way to say it is, “The reason for your suffering is because of something you did.”

Job 1:1 and 2:1-10

There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.

One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the Lord. ²The Lord said to Satan, 'Where have you come from?' Satan answered the Lord, 'From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.' ³The Lord said to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason.'

⁴Then Satan answered the Lord, 'Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives. ⁵But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.' ⁶The Lord said to Satan, 'Very well, he is in your power; only spare his life.'

⁷ So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord, and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. ⁸Job took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and sat among the ashes.

⁹ Then his wife said to him, 'Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die.' ¹⁰But he said to her, 'You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?' In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

I know that there is no good reason for why the innocent suffer. But I also know that if I uttered the words, "You speak as any foolish woman would speak," there would be a good reason for my lack of employment and the pain in my body associated with sleeping on a sofa.

But, with that sin aside, the writer of Job is trying to paint a picture of a sinless man who lost his children, his wealth, his farm, and now his health, and for no good reason, persists in his integrity.

Why? That's what I want to know. That's what Job's wife wants to know. "Why do you persist in your integrity? Curse God and die." You could say that she lost all faith in God, or you could argue that is precisely faith in God.

The story gives us a nameless woman. A woman who is a victim of collateral damage because she is his wife. She has lost her children. No greater pain. She has lost her home and wealth, but it is nothing compared to the loss of all her children.

Your husband is now sick and covered with sores. I can't touch him. No grieving arms to hold one another in pain. "Curse God! And die."

She still believes. She is holding God accountable! "Why would God do this to us?"

It is not in my theology that God desires some to suffer and others not, but then, I remember.

A seminary professor shared a story of his colleague who had lost a son tragically. The grieving father blamed God for the loss of his son. My professor said, "Come on! You know

God didn't cause your son to die." But his friend responded, "Look! I'd rather believe that God caused this to happen, then to think that God wasn't paying attention."

What I'm saying is those who are most angry with God, have a faith that expects more of the Almighty.

Curse God and die! That can be faith.

Yet, this week, I heard a mother tell the story of being on a roof in North Carolina. She thought they had reached a safe place until her home broke apart. She watched her father, mother, and son be swept away. She, too, was swept away. She said that she heard God speaking to her, "Be still and don't try to fight the water." She heard it as a prayer. She said her son's last words were a prayer. She said, "I grieve, but I know they're happy and joyful in the heavens..." And that, too, is faith.

"Curse God and die..." Faith.

"Shall we receive the good from God and not the bad?" Faith...

Look, I don't know why bad things happen to good people. I do know that the most righteous man, the one who was without sin, suffered on a cross.

"Why has thou forsaken me?"

Believing he is forsaken. And yet crying out to the Almighty to be the Almighty! That's faith – expecting more from God.

And that is the faith we follow. We persist in that following.

So, I ask you, why do you persist in your integrity?

Only a few weeks ago, I was in the courtroom listening to Chad Folk speak a Word to the court about his stepfather... a man sentenced for murdering his mother.

Chad spoke these words:

"I know that my belief in Christ teaches me that hating the man who killed my mother won't make terrible darkness recede any faster. Nor does anger or revenge bring back my mother, Jackie.

I asked Chad, why do you persist in your integrity?

And Chad responded, "Although it is hard to imagine forgiving the many acts he committed and the deep hurt he injected into our lives, I do know that, just like every one of us, Mr. Glynn is a child of a loving God. With God, all things are possible."

Again, Chad, why do you persist in your integrity?

"We hope to one day remember Joe as the person we thought we knew before January 1st. We will do our best not to let the acts of one person keep us from remembering Jackie and moving toward being the best versions of who God created us to be."

Why do you persist in your integrity?

Well, I looked around the courtroom, and all the lawyers and spectators, news reporters, and those waiting to be charged were all leaning into his words. Everyone needs to know that there is an answer to suffering, and it is called a good word, a church who holds God accountable. In the midst of despair, there is God.

Why do you believe in a world hell-bent on drawing dividing lines? Why do you persist in believing that the lion and the lamb can lie down together? Why do you persist in believing in the reconciliation of all things?

Why do you persist in your integrity? Why, in a world of multiple truths, do you believe that the truth of one who emptied it all... welcomes all... died for all... lives for all.... Why do you persist in transforming yourself into that one? Far easier is curing God and going with the flow.

In a world where Montreat needs help, Ashville needs help, Morganton needs help, Unicoi County needs help, a family on the last road in Tennessee needs help, the boy in Lebanon, the girl in Israel, the mother in Gaza, the family in South Sudan, our brothers and sisters in Mozambique would love to have a bicycle or 50 to spread the good news. There's so much need! Why do you believe that you have the power to shine in the darkness? How is it that you persist in your integrity?

It is our only hope!

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