Lesson 2 – Going From Bad to Worse (Job 1:22-3:26)

How often have we all heard the saying, “Thing can’t get any worse.” However, sometimes before things get better, they get worse.

Last week we met Job. He was a man who had everything – health, wealth and children. He was a good man, but through a series of tragic events, he found that even he was not exempt from suffering. The remarkable thing about Job’s loss of his wealth and children is that he remained faithful to God. The Bible says that in everything that happened to him, “Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong” (Job 1:22). Job’s faithfulness is exemplary. He trusts God in the midst of that which he cannot understand.

Job’s Adversary (2: 1-3)
Satan had accused Job of a “sunshine faith” of only blessing God because he had been blessed. Satan is proved wrong – Job continues to praise God in the midst of adversity and loss. But Satan does not give up. He pressed his argument in the court of heaven before God. He claims that Job only praises God because tragedy has not touched his person. Job still has his health and reputation as a person of integrity. Attack his health and destroy his reputation, Satan argues, and Job will show his true colors and curse God.

In the Book of Job, Satan is a kind of saboteur – always trying to undermine and destroy the faith of the faithful. He is “devil’s advocate” in the sense that he is always prepared to give arguments against us – what and why we believe and how we behave. His purpose is to shake up our faith and turn us away from God.

Thought to Ponder: The devil may not cause suffering, but he will use it to draw us away from God.

Job’s Affliction (2:4-10)
Satan asks permission from God to test Job further by attacking his good health. His reasoning is that Job could start another family or even build another business, but if his health were taken away, he would curse God to his face (2:5).
God gives Satan permission to attack Job’s health, but not to kill him. So Satan afflicts Job with painful boils “from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head” (2:7). We cannot medically identify this disease, but boils imply some kind of inflammation. The boils covered his entire body, were visible to others and highly painful. In addition, the Bible describes the symptoms of Job’s disease this way:

- Itching (2:8)
- Bad breath (19:17)
- Loss of weight (19:20)
- Insomnia (30:27)
- Darkening of the skin (30:30)

So serious was Job’s condition, that his wife diagnosed it as incurable and suggested to him that he should “curse God and die” (2:9). Job responds with one of the great statements of faith in the Bible, “Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?” (2:10). Job is here giving the Hebrew view that both good and evil come from God – good by God’s active will and evil by God’s permissive will. God can permit evil things to happen for good ends.

**Being faithful to God does not insulate us from adversity.** The best Christians suffer – and no one is spared. Sometimes faithfulness is connected to suffering – we suffer precisely because we are faithful.

The health and wealth gospel, so popular in North American culture today, is wrong. If faith produced health and wealth, we would be faithful for all the wrong reasons. As St. Paul noted, God does not always heal in response to a prayer of faith (2 Cor. 12:7-10). Why didn’t God heal Paul?

We can ask God for healing but we can never demand it. The essence of prayer is request – and a request implies that it may or may not be granted. In the end, we fall back on the belief in the sovereignty of God – that God’s ways are not our ways.

If God heals us, we praise God. But what if God doesn’t heal? What then is our reaction? Which takes more faith: to praise God when you’re healed or to praise God when you’re not healed?

To suffer is to live by faith without knowing why. It is the “Why?” question that proves so elusive in the Book of Job. Often we want to know “Why” we suffer, but often God does not tell us. The reason is basic: God is not in the business of explaining himself. He is in the business of sustaining us. If we knew “Why”, then it would not take much faith to believe in God. Faith – the essence of real faith – is
to believe in God without knowing why bad things happen to us. For us moderns, this is very difficult because we crave an explanation for everything. Yet, faith is living with the mystery instead of craving answers.

In his book *A Grief Observed*, C.S. Lewis tells about the death of his wife. In the book he relates his disappointment with the Christian faith in that his wife was not healed, despite countless prayers and tears. However, at the end of the book, he says his problem was one of expectation. He had a notion of what should happen, and when it didn’t, he became bitter and angry. Our expectations should not be that God will get us out of adversity, but that God will be with us through it. C.S. Lewis was asked, “Why do the righteous suffer?” His answer was, “Why not? They are the only people who can handle it.”

**God promises to see us through our suffering, not to take away our suffering.**

**Job’s Friends (2:11-13)**

When Job’s three friends hear of his predicament, they immediately travel to him (2:11). Clearly, they cared about Job and were willing to travel to see him. When they saw his miserable condition, they did not speak for seven days – customary time of mourning for the dead. Instead, they stayed by his side in silence. This was their greatest gift to Job – their sympathetic and supportive presence.

**Most of the time, the biggest mistake of people is that they talk too much to a suffering person. Just being with the person and being a sympathetic presence is sufficient pastoral support.**

When people are hurting, they don’t need our philosophy or theology; they need our compassion. They want someone who respects their pain. When ministering to a suffering person, never try to justify God or explain pain away. Just care about their hurt. Remember: most hurting people do not want our answers. They want our presence. So give people love, not answers.

**Never rob hurting persons of their feelings. Don’t minimize how much they hurt, even if you think it is excessive. Never say you know the pain of another – you don’t know. At best you can only seek to understand.**

**Job’s Agony (3:1-26)**

After seven days, the silence is over. Job speaks, but instead of cursing God he curses his own birth. He regrets having been born, since he has come into a world where he has known such great suffering (3:3, 11).
In American law today, we have the doctrine of “wrongful life” – one’s very existence is a mistake and that non-life is preferable to life of unbearable suffering and disability. Scholars, ethicists and moral theologians debate the validity of this doctrine which is designed to compensate parents who unknowingly bring a disabled child into the world. The argument is that they would have aborted the child had they known it would be born disabled.

“Why was I born?” is a statement about my purpose and place in life. When our health fails and suffering comes, we ask why.Implicitly, we are asking for the purpose of our existence. Does my life have a meaning, even if I am disabled, handicapped, physically or mentally challenged?

Job is expressing despondency and depression over his state of existence. Sometimes the problems of life can overwhelm us. We ask, “If God is in control of the world, then how could he allow me to suffer like this?” We cry out for answer, but none suffice.

**Sometimes our present pain can cancel out the memories of past joys.**

**Why are we not capable to seeing blessing in adversity? Why do we limit God’s blessings only to the good things of life? God can permit bad things to happen for good ends.**