

“A Blameless and Upright Man”

Job 1: 1-22

Today, we are beginning our summer sermon series and this year, we are focusing on the Book of Job. I'm sure everyone is thinking why Job. It is an odd sort of book, a book that goes into lengthy descriptions about a man sitting on an ash heap, scratching his festering boils with broken pottery. The Book of Job contains forty some of the most depressing chapters in the Bible and so it is no surprise that we find ourselves asking-Really? This is what the preacher picks for our summer series? The Book of Job?

Yes! Yes, I did pick the Book of Job for our summer series. And here's why: because behind those forty some depressing chapters is a great faith story. Behind the descriptions of suffering and ash heaps, is the very basic question we as modern day people of faith struggle with each and every day, that question being, Is our faith based on receiving the good things in life, based on what we can get out of our relationship with God or is our faith based on loving God, serving God, worshipping God for who God really is?

I will tell you some days, I'm not sure I like how I would answer this question because in all honestly, there are moments, more often than not, that I

tend to say that I am a person of faith because of all the good stuff in my life, that God has blessed me more than I know.

Now let me stop right there and say that in all things, there are differing variations to a word. There is blessed and then there is blessed.

Really when we think about it, “blessed” is a funny word. What do we even mean when we say we are blessed by God? Are we saying we are blessed because we have a nice house, money in our accounts, food on our tables? And if that is the message we are trying to convey as people of faith, what about all the other people who don’t find themselves to be so lucky? Are we saying that God favors us over them?

You see, when we start pulling at the strings of the message “blessed” things quickly fall apart and unfortunately we are presented us with an image of a God that I’m not sure we really like or want as our God. I’m not sure we are comfortable with the message or the concept of a God who hands out favors willy nilly, granting some to a few and ignoring others. That’s not a God I want to be in a relationship with in my life!

So what do we do with this idea of blessed by God? We can’t ignore this idea. It is part of our language as people of faith. And let’s face it, we do know that

God does bless us in many ways but how do we use the word bless that reflects the values of the Kingdom of God?

Well, that's where the first chapter of the Book of Job comes in. In just the first couple of lines, we are presented with an amazing picture, the picture of a perceived "blessed" man. We are told that Job is a blameless and upright man, a man totally devoted to God, a man who hates evil with a passion! This rendering of Job's character is followed up with a description of Job's family and his possessions: sons and daughters, wealth beyond measure. And if that was not enough for us to assume Job was blessed, we are told he has influence and prestige. Job is known as the most influential man in the East.

As people of faith, we read this description of Job and immediately we assume that this is what it means to be blessed by God. There is no doubt in our mind. Job is blessed by God. Job is a blameless and upright man, therefore God must reward and has rewarded Job for his faithfulness.

Now let me stop right here and say, the author of Job knows something we don't. The author knows that this man Job is too good to be true. He doesn't exist except as an ideal that we as people of faith have created in our minds as to what we are supposed to achieve when we say we are blameless and upright.

I hate to break it to you, but in reality, the story of Job is set up to be more like a fairy than an actual story about real man that lived in a certain time and in a certain place. From the very beginning, this story reminds us of our own “once upon a time”... “There once was a man...” Furthermore, the country of Uz is not even a real country. It is made up. It could be any country, any place in this whole wide world. It could be right here in Midway if it had to be.

The author sets up the story of Job to be seen as describing any person, in any place, in any time. Job’s story could easily be our story. We hear Job’s and we think we understand what it means to be blessed by God. We hear Job’s story, reflect on our own faith journeys, and We think we know what it means to be a blameless and upright person of God.

However, In just a few lines, the author strips away our assumptions about what it means to be blessed by God and encourages us to live with our questions, the same questions that Satan poses to God, the same questions the world poses to us, each and every day. “Of course Job is going to be faithful to God. God has protected him all along but what happens when all that “blessedness” goes away? Will Job still be faithful and claim God as his God? Will Job still be a blameless and upright man of God even without all the stuff?

Once again, a side note to this text, a much needed side note, to help us understand the context of this story better. When we talk about Satan in this , we aren't talking about a man wearing red with a pitchfork and a pointed tail. That interpretation of Satan comes later in the Church tradition.

In this text, the Hebrew is ha'satan. It is more of a title than a name. It describes more of a position than a person. Think of Satan here as more of a defense attorney who no pun intended liked to play devil's advocate or in this case, God's advocate. The Hebrew tradition of ha'satan shares that this angel of the Lord would travel the earth, hear about where God was being bad mouth and then report back to God. This angel came to God's defense in the situations, rather than creating opportunities for people to go against God. Satan was more God's defense attorney who reported to God than being God's Adversary.

Okay, back to Job. Satan asks the question the world asks of us as people of faith each and every day. Of course, you believe in God. You say that God has blessed you. You believe yourself to be a blameless and upright person of God. But what happens if all that stuff, all the good things you have in life, what happens if all that goes away? Would we still be faithful and worship our God even in the hard times of life? Would we still consider ourselves to be blameless and upright, claiming a God who supposedly no longer shows favor to us?

Now please don't hear me say that this is an easy question or that it has a simple one word answer. The Book of Job takes 41 chapters to answer it and I'll be honest, I'm not sure I like the way it answers it. But that's another sermon in this series. You'll just have to come back for that.

What I am saying and what I am inviting us to realize is that the world is not always black and white. It has more grey than we realize and somewhere in that grey, is where we live out and have our faith. It is in the greyness of life in which we struggle with what it means to be blessed by God. It is in the greyness of life in which we struggle with what it means to be a person of faith, blameless and upright in the eyes of God. It is in the greyness of life in which we try to figure out who God is calling us to be.

What I am inviting us to do today and all days is to let go of the ideal and become authentic people of faith who live in the real world, live out our faith as people who have or are at least trying to figure out what it means to be a person of faith in this grey and complicated world.

I fully admit that sometimes it is hard to hold onto our faith in spite of all the grey in the world. It is hard to hold onto our faith when it feels like the world is crashing down upon us. It is hard to say we will be faithful when we feel like God has abandoned us.

I cannot promise you by the end of this sermon series we will have more faith or that we will be able to confidently say yes to God in times of hardship and suffering. Instead, What I can do is extend an invitation to see that Job's story is our story and that the character of Job, the character we hold as people of faith is what this whole story, what our story as people of faith actually hinges upon.

As people of faith, we need to realize that when we come face to face with the greyness of life, we have a lot at stake in the conversation but God has a whole lot more at stake that we do.

Let me explain: Our character as people of faith reflects on us but even more so, it reflects on God. Our character as people of faith should reflect the nature and character of the God we worship, the God we claim, the God we say who loves us more than we can imagine.

But If our character as people of faith hinges upon a God who blesses only people who can live up to an ideal, a God who blesses only people who can be an ideal that doesn't even exist, then we are in trouble, but God is in more trouble than us.

Our story, our character should say a lot about the God we claim and worship in our lives. And it all hinges upon how well we deal with God as we struggle with the question what does it mean for us to be blames and upright as

people of faith. If God is only our God in the good times, that we are in trouble and God is in more trouble than us.

As I have lived with this text this past week and yes have wondered myself Why Job, I have come to the realization, Why not Job? Job is our story and it becomes this great invitation for us as people of faith to once again dig into our faith, dig into our relationship with God and to ask the hard questions, not just because we want to know the answers but because the answers to these hard questions shape how well we live out our faith in a world that seems to want to ignore or deny the greyness of life.

No one said that faith should have all the answers. What faith really is about is the possibilities. So When we struggle with the hard questions and dig into our relationship with God, we might just find ourselves, like Job, having an incredible and life changing conversation with our God, and really becoming blessed by God in ways we never imagined.

This past week, as I was preparing for this sermon, I came across a phenomenal article simply titled, “The One Thing Christians Should Stop Saying...” It touches on all the things I mentioned before but it didn’t stop the conversation at that point. This article reminded me once again that Jesus would

have a very different definition of what it means to be blessed, what it means to be blameless and upright as a person of faith.

Jesus would say, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of God." Jesus would say, "Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted." Jesus would say, "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me."

Jesus would say, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."

Jesus had a very different definition of what it means to be blessed. Jesus had a very different definition of what it means to be a blameless and upright person of faith.

I want to share the ending of the article because it says it much better than I ever could:

The truth is, I have no idea why I was born where I was or why I have the opportunity I have. It's beyond comprehension. But I certainly don't believe God has chosen me above others because of the veracity of my prayers or the depth of my faith. Still, if I take advantage of the opportunities set before me, a comfortable life *may* come my way. It's not guaranteed. But if it does happen, I don't believe Jesus will call me blessed.

He will call me "burdened."

He will ask,

"What will you do with it?"

"Will you use it for yourself?"

"Will you use it to help?"

"Will you hold it close for comfort?"

"Will you share it?"

So many hard choices. So few easy answers.

So my prayer today is that I understand my true blessing. It's not my house. Or my job. Or my standard of living.

No.

My blessing is this. I know a God who gives hope to the hopeless. I know a God who loves the unlovable. I know a God who comforts the sorrowful. And I know a God who has planted this same power within me. Within all of us.

And for this blessing, may our response always be,

"Use me."

Use me. We can only say these words authentically as people of faith when we begin to let go of an ideal that doesn't even exist anyway and start becoming the people that God created us to be in the first place. And for us to do that we must realize that being in a relationship with God, a true relationship with God, a relationship where we share the good, the bad, the ugly and the breath-takingly beautiful. For us to become the people that God created us to be, we must realize that being in a relationship is hard, not because God punishes or blesses us at a whim but because in the end, our relationship with God should be based on our love for God rather than what God has done or can do for us. That is what it means to be blameless and upright. To be in a real authentic relationship with God,

knowing we are loved more than we could imagine and sharing that love with others, no matter the cost.

As a blameless and upright man, Job, as things started to fall apart, when the world came crashing down upon him, did something amazing. It probably wasn't easy and it may not have been his first reaction. But when he heard the chaos that had entered his life, he fell down and worshipped God.

I like to think deep down, in that moment, Job understood that to be a blameless and upright man of God, he didn't need to achieve an ideal. All he had to do was understand that his story, his life was intrinsically bounded up with God's story, with God's life and nothing about understanding is false or fake.

As people of faith, Job's story is our story, and our story is God's story and there is nothing about that story that cannot be trusted.

We are called to be blameless and upright people of God, grounded in the knowledge that our God gives hope to the hopeless, love to the unlovable, comfort to the suffering and that our God has planted that same power within all of us.

May our prayer always be: Help us to be a blessing for others because in truth that is what really makes us blameless and upright in the eyes of God. Amen.

We Are the Church

Refrain (Unison)

I am the church! You are the church! We are the church to -

geth - er! All who fol - low Je - sus,

all a - round the world! Yes, we're the church to - geth - er!

1 The church is not a build - ing, the church is not a stee - ple,
2 We're man - y kinds of peo - ple, with man - y kinds of fac - es,
3 Some - times the church is march - ing, some - times it's brave - ly burn - ing,
4 And when the peo - ple gath - er, there's sing - ing and there's pray - ing,
5 At Pen - te - cost some peo - ple re - ceived the Ho - ly Spir - it

the church is not a rest - ing place, the church is a peo - ple.
all col - ors and all a - ges, too, from all times and plac - es.
some - times it's rid - ing, some - times hid - ing, al - ways it's learn - ing.
there's laugh - ing and there's cry - ing some - times, all of it say - ing:
and told the Good News through the world to all who would hear it.