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Bible Study **The Character of Christ [pt. 4]: PATIENCE**

There are many layers of understanding and interpretation for the book of Job. Some topics addressed in Job include the nature of God's sovereignty, innocent suffering, and Job's long-suffering (patient) struggle between the two.

Unlike Job, we know why he is going through his time of trouble and tragedy. In the midst of his tragic circumstances he struggles with his understanding of God's sovereignty, and yet he holds true to his convictions and his integrity. Popular theology of his day held that all suffering was deserved. If one suffered from some sort of evil or trouble, it merely indicated that God was punishing the sufferer for sins committed. This is essentially the argument that Job's three friends put forward in chapters 3-25.

Job does not disagree with his friends' theology. Rather, he maintains that it simply does not apply to him. He maintains his innocence, and therefore struggles with a theology that allows for the suffering of the innocent.

Chapters 1-2 introduce Job's story to us. It begins by introducing to us a man from Uz named Job. We are told that he is "blameless and upright" (1:1, 8), and "the greatest among people" (1:3). The next scene takes us into the courts of God where, unbeknown to Job, God and Satan enter into a wager concerning Job's piety and integrity. And innocent, righteous Job suffers unimaginable tragedy.

Before we move on, we must understand that the Hebrew word from which the name 'Satan' is derived is not a name, but a title: *ha-satan* (the satan). *Ha-satan* means "the accuser." In the telling of this story, the accuser is not the personification of evil, but merely plays the role of 'prosecuting attorney'. It is his job to bring forth accusations so that the Lord's justice may prevail.

And so, in the scenes leading to the first test (1:6-22) and the second test (2:1-13) Satan accuses Job of being faithful to God only because God has blessed him, keeping him safe and healthy (1:9). A wager is then struck which brings much tragedy into Job's life.

As mentioned above, the book of Job wrestles with (though it may not answer) questions about the suffering of innocents in relation to the goodness, justice, and sovereignty of God. If we had time to go into the other chapters of the book, we

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would see Job wrestling mightily with the tension between the knowledge that God is always just and righteous **AND YET** Job suffers innocently.

Through 31 chapters Job wrestles with these issues while suffering from the loss of wealth, livelihood, children, health, friendships, and estrangement from his wife. Moreover, through it all, God is silent. Only at the very end (chapters 38-41) does God answer Job. But the “WHY” in Job’s complaints to God are not answered. God’s answer to Job boils down to, “Trust me Job. Just keep trusting me. There is more going on than you have the capacity to understand. So, regardless of your circumstances, simply trust that I’ve always got you.”

Job is known for his patience, but it is not patience as we commonly understand it. In that sense of the word, Job is not a paragon of patience. Job’s patience is found in his long-suffering, his perseverance. It is found in his faithfulness to God, even in the depths of his despair. Even when the answer from the Lord did not answer his questions, Job remained faithful — going so far as to pray for and make sacrifices in behalf of his friends who had accused him even more harshly than Satan.

The suffering of innocents, and tragedy befalling the righteous are not conundrums only for Job. We too, wrestle with these problems. Job was given no easy answer to the “why” of human suffering, especially innocent suffering. Neither do we, have those answers. The best, I think, that we can do to understand the suffering of innocents, is to look to the Cross of Christ. No one more innocent or more righteous ever suffered so much as did Jesus on our behalf. And yet, Jesus’ suffering and sacrifice was due to God’s love for and patience toward us.

And the answer to the question for us is the same that was given to Job: God says, “Trust me. I’m still in control. I will never let you go. Trust me.” It is that trust, that long-suffering, that forbearance, that perseverance, that patience of Job (*James 5:11*) and the endurance of Christ (*Hebrews 12:2*) to which Paul refers in his teaching on the Fruit of the Spirit (*Galatians 5:22-25*). “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, **patience**...If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.”

So, may you see in your own sufferings that God has not let you go. And may you persevere as our Lord did. For, in the words Paul, “we glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”

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Character of Christ [pt. 3]: Patience Questions for Further Reflection

Job 1:1 - 2:13

What impresses you most about Job? What does it mean that Job is “blameless and upright” (vv. 1:1, 1:8)? What does it suggest to you that Job regular sacrifices to God, while his children feast (vv. 1:4-5)?

How are the major characters in Job chapters 1-2 depicted: God? Satan? Job? Why did Satan choose Job (v. 1:8)? What does it mean that the Lord, not Satan, initiates the testing of Job? Do any theological problems arise for you if no evil can happen to man apart from God’s permission (v. 2:10; see *1 Chronicles 21:1 w/ 2 Samuel 24:1*; see also *1 Samuel 16:14, 2 Samuel 24:16, 2 Corinthians 12:7*)? Why does God allow Satan to afflict Job? What limits does God place on Satan (vv. 1:12, 2:6)? Does Job’s experience help you understand your own ‘troubles’?

Who is really on trial here (God, Satan, Job)? Whose integrity is really at stake (God, Satan, Job)? How does Job score on this first test (vv. 1:20-22)? What evidence is there of his faith?

How do Job’s responses (vv. 1:20-21, 2:10) strike you? How would you have responded to similar circumstances? How does Job’s wife respond (v. 2:9)? How might we sympathize with Job’s wife, considering that she has also endured much loss and that Job is now sitting silently on an ash heap? In light of the suffering that you have experienced and observed in others, do you find yourself feeling more like Job or his wife? How can you keep trusting God even when the end isn’t in sight?

How do Job’s three friends respond (vv. 2:11-13)? What do you find commendable and worth imitating? What would you have said or done? When is silence more preferable (and perhaps more healing) than words?

Founded upon trust of God, Job is known for his long-suffering, his patience. What could you today and this next week to cultivate that same trust in God so the you may persevere as Job did?

After all of his losses, Job responded by worshiping God. What can you praise God for right now?