

Faith and Hope at Ground Zero

Job 1:21-22

By Phil Johnson

If you are like me, you may be a bit fatigued from all the news and media coverage this week on the anniversary of the September 11 attacks. Some of it was interesting. I saw some absolutely fascinating accounts of faith and courage in the midst of the disaster. They showed footage I had never seen. I heard some stories I had never heard before about people who escaped, and others who died as heroes. There was a horrifying video that was filmed from inside the north tower during the collapse of the south tower, and you could hear people hitting the lower roof after having jumped out of the towers to their death. Some of those pictures and videotapes were extremely disturbing, and it was a difficult and still-shocking experience to relive the disaster again after just one year.

But I found it very hard to look away and ignore what they were showing. The scale of the disaster was so much larger than anything we are accustomed to in the United States. The impact of it all on the American consciousness has been so profound. In fact, what stood out most in my mind as I viewed the documentaries is that it is impossible for anyone to try to make sense of this tragedy without in some way making reference to God. God's name and questions about God's sovereignty came up in every program I saw this week about the disaster.

There was even an interview with one atheist who said that he had felt utterly left out of the national discussion in the wake of September 11, because everyone else's

thoughts turned so much toward God that nobody wanted to hear what an atheist might have to say.

And that is true on a certain level. From the very beginning of the attacks last year, even the secular news media seemed to be searching for some spiritual significance in the disaster. News anchors, commentators, and talk-show hosts who would never think of speaking about God before September 11 were suddenly invoking His name. I think people instinctively knew that somehow there must be spiritual lessons to be drawn from the disaster. God had to figure into the picture somehow. The tragedy was so large that the only way to make sense of it—ad the only hope we have in the midst of it—is if there is a God who is even larger than the disaster.

And that is an uncomfortable thought, isn't it? If God is bigger than this tragedy, why did He permit it in the first place? Millions of Americans have asked that question over the past year.

But sadly, people for the most part have failed to grasp the true spiritual significance of it all. They are asking good questions, but they don't know where to go for answers. In some cases, people have already made up their minds that if the answers point to the God of Scripture, they don't want Him anyway.

All of this was portrayed vividly a few days ago in a two-hour special on PBS. Their series called "Frontline" featured a two-hour special called "Faith and Doubt at Ground Zero." Some of you may have seen it. I thought it was a riveting two hours of television. Its whole aim was to explore the question of what September 11 means about God. Is He there? Why didn't He stop it? What does the disaster say about *God's* character? Here were the questions that led off the documentary: "If there is a

God, what is happening?; How could God be in the horror of what I saw?; What kind of God is this?; How can you believe in such a God?"

As I said, it was an absolutely engrossing two hours of television. But it was extremely disturbing, too. Although they interviewed several priests and rabbis and other religious leaders, not one person in the entire two-hour special gave a biblical perspective of God or tried to deal with the problem of evil from a biblical perspective. You were sort of left with the feeling that no one anywhere has any clue how things like this can happen if there really is a loving God. The only answers that were offered were humanistic, rationalistic, and mystical mumbo-jumbo without a single reference to Scripture.

Here were some of the things people said on the program. I' quoting verbatim from a transcript of the program:

- ! One woman who lost her husband said, "I couldn't believe that this God that I'd talked to in my own way for 35 years turned this loving man into bones, and now I can't bring myself to speak to him anymore because I feel so abandoned.
- ! Someone else said, "If people can kill for God in this way, this is the best reason never to believe in God!"
- ! A security guard who had lost several friends said, "I think God could have just ended this all. That's why I feel strongly that I'm losing respect for him. I know there's a Trinity. I believe in the Son, but the Father I'm having a rough time dealing with. . . . I didn't have any love for God the weeks that followed September 11th. It was really hatred. I can't accept this unless I can have an answer as to why it all occurred. . . . It was too barbaric, the way the lives

were taken. That wasn't mercy. So I look at [God] now as a barbarian, and I probably will. And it's a sad situation. I think I'm a good Christian, but I have a different view and image of him now, and I can't replace it with the old image."

- ! An Episcopal priest said, "After September 11th, the face of God was a blank slate for me. God couldn't be counted on in the way I thought God could be counted on. That's what I felt as I stood on Ground Zero. God seemed absent. And it was frightening because the attributes that I had depended upon had all been stripped away. And I was left with nothing but that thing we call faith. But faith in what? I wasn't so sure."
- ! A rabbinical student said, "Our anthems are basically hymns to this majestic God But September 11th killed that God for me because there was no way to have a majestic God, a God who controlled everything. There was no way to have a God who understood reward and punishment, fair or unfair There was a God on September 11th who didn't even mind that God's own name could be used as the final prayer of a suicide hijacker as he plowed into a building. We needed, and I know *I* needed, to have *another* God to turn to at that moment, or there was going to be no God.
- ! A conservative Rabbi said, "Since September 11th, this, for me, that there's something out there and that I'm here, no longer meant anything because every time I thought there was something out there, it turns into inevitably something opposed to me, something I have to define myself against."

! A different rabbi, an Orthodox Rabbi, railed against the idea of God's sovereignty. He said you can believe if you want to that God has a plan in everything, but that is not the god he worships.

Some of them literally cursed God on the air, and in effect, most of those who expressed an opinion agreed with those who cursed God. In the entire two-hour program not one person affirmed that God is both sovereign and good. In other words, the God of Scripture was completely ignored by the writers of that program.

And I think that is profoundly sad, because I imagine thousands who watched the program ended up being plunged into a deeper sense of despair than ever. Darlene could hardly stand to watch it, because of the sense of utter hopelessness that permeated the entire two hours. For two solid hours we watched the spilling forth of the most poignant and bitter human emotions without ever once hearing anyone give these grieving people a word from the Lord. The documentary left both Darlene and me profoundly sad, and it made me wish I could stand up somewhere and say something about how the Bible deals with the questions that program raised.

So this morning that is what I want to do. I am absolutely convinced that it is possible to see the face of God even in the darkest of human disasters. I believe it is possible to know that He is absolutely sovereign over the affairs of this world; to know that He is still on the throne even while wicked men are doing extraordinary acts of evil; to believe that He remains in charge of everything that happens—and *still* trust that He is good, and gracious, and loving, and perfectly righteous in every way. There is no reason to question God's goodness, or His power, or His righteousness when evil occurs. God is

not the least bit diminished by what unrighteous men or evil principalities and powers do.

Of course, I didn't suffer personal loss in the terrorist attacks on the same scale as thousands of people who *did* suffer unimaginable losses. I heard this week an astonishing figure. More than ten thousand children lost parents in the terrorist attacks on September 11 a year ago. Obviously many more thousands of people lost loved ones and spouses, friends and fellow-workers. Hundreds were injured, some were permanently disabled. The pain and scars those people suffered are deep, long-lasting, and bitter—and our hearts go out to them still.

But some might think that if you haven't personally suffered a loss like that, then you're not really qualified to render any opinion on how to make sense of God in the midst of the grief.

That is why this morning I want to turn to the testimony of a man who suffered a series of unimaginable, catastrophic losses and *still* gave testimony to the goodness and wisdom of God in the midst of his grief.

I'm talking, of course, about Job. So if you'll turn to Job 1, I want to review what happened to him and pay careful attention to his immediate response. And then from his response we'll draw some lessons that will help us come to grips with God in the midst of horrible disaster.

Job 1, and to set the context, let me begin reading at the beginning of the chapter:

**Job 1:1 There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil.
2 And seven sons and three daughters were born to him.**

3 Also, his possessions were seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred female donkeys, and a very large household, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the East.

4 And his sons would go and feast in their houses, each on his appointed day, and would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them.

5 So it was, when the days of feasting had run their course, that Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did regularly.

Now, notice, Job's sons were evidently adults, because they lived in their own houses. And they were obviously a close-knit family, because of the way they celebrated these special occasions together. Verse 4 says the sons would **go and feast in their houses, each on his appointed day**. That probably refers to their birthdays. And since there were seven of them, that was a lot of birthday parties. But this was a kind of model family that enjoyed one another's fellowship, so it was their custom to do this every year. These were not parties for the sheer sake of fun and self-indulgence; they were celebrations of their mutual love and affection, and the harmony and unity among these brothers and sisters. The proof is the fact that these celebrations were for the siblings—not friends and business associates, but family. The three sisters are particularly mentioned. They were probably young enough to still live at home, but they were invited to and included in these celebrations with their brothers. The bonds of love were clearly strong in this family. These were wholesome, family-oriented celebrations, and they

became the defining feature of this family. This was a model family, with model children.

And each year when the cycle of birthdays was over, it was Job's practice to **"send and sanctify them"—that is, he would send for them all, and gather them together, and then "he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all."** Now, burnt offerings were a lot of work and a lot of expense. He was giving ten sacrifices—one for each of his children. Why did Job offer all these sacrifices? Not because he knew of sins the kids had committed. Certainly not because the children were openly sinning, but just in case one of them *might* have had a blasphemous thought, or a thought that dishonored God. Verse 5 says, **"For Job said, 'It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.'"** He was that fastidious about being the spiritual head of his family.

It is no wonder that God had blessed this man. He was a truly godly man—not sinless, surely, but a man who loved God and despised sin and knew that every sin (even an unintentional, fleeting thought that dishonors God, even though it takes place in the secret recesses of the heart), every such sin is enough to condemn a person. Sin was exceedingly sinful, in Job's estimation. So he offered sacrifices that covered even the secret or unintentional sins his children may have committed. And verse 5 says, **"Thus Job did *regularly*."**

Well, you know the story, so I won't read every verse. Satan comes before God, and since he has nothing concrete to accuse Job with, he questions Job's motives. Verses 9-10: **"Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land."** *No wonder Job obeys you. He wouldn't do that*

if you let him suffer. Verse 11: **"But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!"**

Notice, here is this idea of cursing God again. This is a theme throughout the book of Job. Remember, verse 5, Job abhorred the idea that one of his sons might curse God in his heart. Cursing God is what Satan wanted *Job* to do. Later in the story (Job 2:9), even Job's wife tells him, **"Curse God and die!"** So the idea of cursing God is crucial to the story of Job. Job consistently refused to curse God, no matter how bad his sufferings became.

So let's pick up the story in verse 12: **"The LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD."**

Notice that the Lord gave Satan permission to afflict Job. But he expressly set a boundary the devil could not cross. He could touch Job's possessions and do with them whatever he wanted, but he could not touch Job's person. Later in chapter 2, verse 6, God would expand the boundaries and permit Satan to afflict Job's body, but, He said, "Spare his life."

So we see that God is absolutely sovereign. Satan cannot do anything to Job without God's express permission. God sets and enforces the limits, and Satan couldn't raise one finger against Job until God said he could.

Notice also that Satan was the agent of the evil that afflicted Job. God is not the one who smote Job. The fact that God is sovereign does not make Him the agent or the effectual cause of the evil that occurs. You can see in verse 11, and in Job 2:5, that Satan challenged God Himself to afflict Job. But God did not do it. He simply withdrew the restraints that held the devil back, and then Satan himself actually did the evil. Satan was the agent

and the effectual cause of the evil, not God. Don't ever get the notion that God's sovereignty makes Him the author or the agent of evil. He is not. More on this in a minute.

Now look at what happened to Job. Verse 13:

13 Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house;

14 and a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them,

15 "when the Sabeans raided them and took them away; indeed they have killed the servants with the edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you!"

16 While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them; and I alone have escaped to tell you!"

17 While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three bands, raided the camels and took them away, yes, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you!"

18 While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house,

19 "and suddenly a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead; and I alone have escaped to tell you!"

What a devastating series of calamities! In rapid-fire succession, this series of messengers come from the four corners of Job's empire and essentially tell him that

he has lost everything, including his beloved children, who apparently were having one of their family birthday parties when a powerful wind caused the house to collapse on them. And in one fell blow, he lost all ten of his children.

Now the losses in the World Trade Center collapse were staggering, but even in that, not one person lost as much as Job lost on that one dark day of his life.

Look at his response:

20 Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped.

21 And he said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD."

22 In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.

Isn't that remarkable?

Now, I know there were many believers who lost family and possessions on September 11th last year, and in many cases, their response was just as righteous as Job's. They didn't blame God. They honored Him even in the midst of their loss and grief. People like Lisa Beamer, whose husband perished in the crash of the fourth jetliner in Pennsylvania. Others who don't get as much publicity but who have glorified God despite suffering heartbreaking losses.

But sadly, there are many *other* people who have rebelled against God because of September 11, blamed Him for the evil, and literally cursed Him. Those were the voices we heard in the PBS special. Unfortunately, they speak for a large number of Americans who have responded the same way.

But Job's immediate response was to acknowledge God's right to do whatever He pleases with His creatures: **"The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD."**

We know from reading the entire book of Job that this trial got even worse for him. He was afflicted physically. He got bad advice from his wife and friends. He was pretty much left to endure this trial on his own. He even felt God had abandoned him. In Job 23:3, Job says, **"Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, That I might come to His seat!"**

Now remember, Job, by God's own testimony, was a righteous man, **"blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil"** (1:1); and verse 8, **"there is none like him on the earth."** But even the most righteous people on earth sometimes feel God is obscured by the darkness of grief and suffering. Job *felt* abandoned by God. He *felt* overwhelmed by grief and personal loss. I imagine it would be pretty hard for any of us to understand how he felt, how much it hurt, and how bitter the whole experience tasted. But I'll tell you this: What Job suffered was no easier for him emotionally than it would be for you and me, no matter how righteous he was. He still felt the same kind of pain, with the same intensity, that you and I would feel if we suffered this way. Chapter 2, verse 13 says his friends **"sat down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his grief was very great."**

But can I tell you something? Listen carefully, because this is important: Human emotions don't help us make sense of these things. If you want to sort through the problem of evil, you have to think sensibly, and theologically, and biblically, and not let your emotions rule your mind.

Job was a wise enough man than to know better than to respond by reflex on the basis of his feelings. If he had responded according to what he *felt* like, he might have cursed God. If he had just given vent to his feelings, he might have begun to think about God the same way some of those people on the PBS special think. He could have easily been consumed with bitterness, and self-pity, and anger, and frustration, and he might have been tempted to take his wife's advice: "**Curse God and die!**"

But Job's reply is the reply of someone who knows something about God. Job had filtered his response through his theology. It still did not make sense to him *why* he had to suffer like this (and that is why Job is 42 chapters long; because it records the dialogue Job had with his friends as he tried to sort this out). But even though it made no sense to him, even though he was overwhelmed with painful *feelings*, his response made no mention of those feelings. He doesn't focus on any doubt or confusion he might have been struggling with. Instead, his response was a bold affirmation of what he *knew* to be true about God.

Faced with the darkness of pain, and loss, he didn't go chasing his emotions and his uncertainty; he stood firm and clung to what he knew for sure. He anchored his soul on what he knew was true about God, rather than setting himself adrift on a sea of confusion and doubt. In other words, Job passed this trial because he was a theologian. It was sound theology, not his feelings, that enabled him to weather the immediate shock of the news that his children and everything he owned were gone forever. This is why sound theology is so important, and so practical.

Now, notice what truths Job clung to. These were the things Job knew for sure about God. These were the

truths that became his anchor. And throughout the book of Job, amid all his complaints and pleading, he never once lets go of these principles. Here are three truths Job clung to in order to see him through his grief. You can take them down on your note sheet as we go. First—

1. GOD IS SOVEREIGN

Job was a staunch Calvinist. He knew and confessed instantly that God was sovereignly in control of Job's life, even though Job himself had every reason to feel like his life was spinning out of control. As I said, as you go through the book, you'll find that he asks all the same questions anyone would ask in a situation like this. He wanted to know why. He wondered if he had done something to deserve judgment. He wondered if God was angry with him for something. He had lots of questions.

But *here*, in his initial response, he simply affirms that which he knew beyond doubt: that God is sovereign and He therefore permitted this to happen: "**The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away.**" He knew the hand of God was in it. He doesn't rebuke Satan or even mention him. Job's focus was on God, and he knew this bitter providence could not have come to him apart from God's knowledge and express permission.

But even so, Job doesn't try to explain away God's sovereignty by dismissing it as *bare* permission. He knew God had a purpose in this. God wasn't a mere bystander, uninvolved and unconcerned. Job uses active verbs: "**The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away.**" As we're going to see in a moment, Job doesn't blame God for the evil in the act, but he doesn't for a moment imagine that God was a helpless bystander when these things happened.

This is a healthy view of the sovereignty of God. Job knew that God controls providence. He is still in control even when it seems like evil has taken over.

In other words, when God gave Satan permission to afflict Job, it was a willing permission, not something involuntary that Satan tricked or goaded God to allow against His better judgment. God had a purpose and a plan in this.

And even though Job never had the benefit of knowing what we know because of the behind-the-scenes glimpse of heaven we are given in verses 6-12, Job trusted from the start that God was still firmly in control. If Job suffered, it could only be because God was allowing him to suffer. Job knew that God had a purpose in it. *We* get to see what took place in heaven that led to Job's trial. Job himself did not have the advantage of that knowledge. But he *did* know enough about God to know that God is sovereign. And you'll remember, that is the very point of verses 6-12. Satan could not touch anything that was Job's without God's permission. God had given that permission, and Job knew that even without seeing the scene in heaven, because he already had a right view of God's sovereignty.

Furthermore, Job understood that God has a right to do with His creatures whatever He chooses. If He decides to allow us to suffer, He has every right to do so. In Job 2:10, Job tells his wife, "**You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?**" In Lamentations 3:38-41, the prophet Jeremiah wrote,

**38 Is it not from the mouth of the Most High
That woe and well-being proceed?**

**39 Why should a living man complain, A man
for the punishment of his sins?**

**40 Let us search out and examine our ways,
And turn back to the LORD;
41 Let us lift our hearts and hands To God in
heaven.**

Jesus said to Peter on the night of his betrayal, "**Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?**" (John 18:11).

That was also Job's perspective. It was surely not something that arose from the grief and pain he was suffering at that moment. But it was the perspective his theology about God had taught him. And it was what he knew from his theology, not *what he felt with his emotions*, that enabled him to endure this trial.

Here's a second truth about God that emerges from Job's response:

2. GOD IS JUST

Look at verse 22: "**In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.**"

That is a remarkable statement. Remember the quotes I read you from the PBS documentary? The one thing they all had in common was that they charged God with wrong. They *blamed* God. They questioned His justice.

Job *knew* that God is just. So while acknowledging that God was sovereignly in control of all the disasters that had befallen him, Job was careful not to *blame* God in any way.

This is a difficult balance to achieve. There are even some Calvinists—I'd call them hyper-Calvinists—who fall into the trap of blaming God for evil, treating His sovereignty over evil in such a way that they make Him the efficient cause and the author of evil. That is simply bad theology. Don't fall into the trap of wanting your doctrine of divine sovereignty to be so high and so

absolute that you end up portraying God as the author and agent of evil. He is not.

Don't ever imagine that God exercises his sovereignty over evil in the same active way he exercises sovereignty over good. Don't ever suggest that God causes evil in the same way He causes good. He is the active agent and efficient cause of the good that comes to us. He isn't the originator of evil in the same way He is the originator of good.

Evil is not a created thing. Evil is a defect in something God created to be good. When God finished His creative work, He pronounced *everything* "**very good**" (Genesis 1:31), so evil cannot be something God created. Evil is not a substance or a created thing. It represents the marring of what God created good. The agents of evil are Satan, the demons, and fallen humanity. They are the ones responsible for damaging what God made to be good. God's sovereignty does not change that fact.

Now, God certainly permitted evil. It isn't something that caught Him off guard or took Him by surprise. He is not the helpless victim of evildoers. Evil was part of His plan from before the foundation of the world. But He is not to *blame* for it. He is not the agent or author who is responsible for it. He uses it for His own wise and holy ends, but He doesn't sanction it, condone it, or otherwise approve it.

Notice, again, in verse 11, that Satan challenged God to afflict Job. He said, "**Stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!**" But God did not stretch out His hand and afflict Job. That was left for Satan to do. All God did was remove the restraints from Satan, and Satan was the agent of the evil.

So we see that Job suffered according to the plan and providence of God, but God was not the source of the

evil; Satan was. Job understood this, and that is why although he knew God is sovereign, he did not *blame* God for evil.

Likewise, in the September 11 disasters, God remained in control and strictly set the limits on what evildoers could do. It happened according to His plan and providence. But blame for the evil lies completely with the wicked men who carried out the suicide missions, not with God. We're not for a moment to imagine that His sovereignty makes Him blameworthy. To entertain such a thought would be to curse God in our hearts—the very thing Job was so determined never to do.

Here's a third truth about God we see in Job's response:

3. GOD IS GOOD

Look again at verse 21: "**The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD.**" In the midst of his trials, Job was confessing that God is good. This was the very opposite of what Satan claimed Job would do. Verse 11: "**he will surely curse You to Your face!**" Instead, Job blessed God's name. He knew that even in the midst of this horrible calamity, despite all the evil that had befallen him, God was *good*.

Job did not understand God's purpose, of course. He did not know about Satan's challenge. But he knew the character of God. That is why he was so tormented trying to figure it all out. But you can read all his complaints and protests, and you will see that he never once impugns the goodness of God. In fact, in Job 13:15, Job says, "**Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.**" He trusted that God was good.

Did you realize that in the New Testament, James says this is the very lesson the book of Job is designed to

teach us? Listen to James 5:10-11: **"My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen *the end intended by the Lord*; that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful."**

Even this horrible trial was a token of the Lord's mercy and compassion to Job. I know that is hard to grasp because of our human prejudices, but I am certain that when we get to heaven, we will hear testimony from the lips of Job himself about the great goodness and compassion of God that came to him because of his trial.

See, although Scripture says Job was a righteous man, that doesn't mean he wasn't a sinner. It means he was a justified sinner. His conscience was clear of any unrepented sin, and he outlines that argument in chapter 31. Some have suggested that there was an element of overconfidence or self-righteousness in Job. But remember that even Satan had nothing to accuse him for in chapter 1. He was justified. He was forgiven. He had devoted his life to the pursuit of holiness, and there was no gross or life-destroying sin in his life.

Still, Job was not sinless. He acknowledged his need for a Redeemer in Job 19:25. And at the end of the book, when He gets an even better picture of God's greatness and sovereignty, Job's response in Job 42:6 is, "I abhor myself, And repent in dust and ashes."

But let me be clear: God did not afflict Job in order to punish him for his sin. God was testing him, proving him, and strengthening his faith. God's ultimate purpose for Job was good, even though the immediate effect was calamity. This was not punishment for his sin.

On the other hand, however, Job, as a sinful creature, had no claim on any blessing of any kind. God could justly afflict him, because Job needed to be refined and strengthened. And God's

ultimate purpose, as James 5:11 says, was compassion and mercy.

Consider this: Job's loss was temporary. All his afflictions were transient, passing afflictions that would eventually give way to an even greater weight of eternal glory. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:17, "**our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.**"

Suffering is the price and prelude of glory. But while the suffering is temporary, the glory is eternal, and infinitely greater. *That* is our hope in the midst of suffering.

God eventually gave Job back more than he had lost. Turn to Job 42. Let me read verses 12-17:

12 Now the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; for he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, one thousand yoke of oxen, and one thousand female donkeys.

13 He also had seven sons and three daughters.

14 And he called the name of the first Jemimah, the name of the second Keziah, and the name of the third Keren-Happuch.

15 In all the land were found no women so beautiful as the daughters of Job; and their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers.

16 After this Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his children and grandchildren for four generations.

17 So Job died, old and full of days.

When I first read that years ago, I couldn't help feeling that new sons and daughters would hardly make up for the children Job had lost forever. As a father, I cannot imagine the pain that would be caused by the loss of one of my sons. And a new son wouldn't ease the sorrow of

loss or make up for the pain of it. So my first reaction to this passage, years ago, was to think this was scant comfort for Job.

But consider this: Job's children were righteous, too. So when he died, old and full of age, he was instantly reunited with them for all eternity. Even now, they are together in the Lord's presence. Job, from heaven's perspective, can look back on that trial and say it was truly a light and passing affliction, and the Lord restored to him everything he ever lost, and more.

That is our joy and our confidence in the midst of disaster. It may be contrary to the feelings we experience when we suffer loss, but from an eternal perspective, it is a far more solid rock on which to anchor than the way we *feel* in the midst of calamity. That's why theology is so important. It teaches us that despite what we may feel, God is still in control; he is just and righteous; and above all, He is good.

That is what the promise of Romans 8:28 teaches us, isn't it? "**We know that all things work together for good.**" How do we know that? Because we know that God is good, and so no matter what He does—no matter how painful or hard to understand it may be for the moment—we know He will use it for good. And it is the very definition of faith to be able to cling to that promise no matter what.

In the words of Psalm 31:19, "**Oh, how great is Your goodness, Which You have laid up for those who fear You, Which You have prepared for those who trust in You In the presence of the sons of men!**" Help us, Lord, to trust what we know, even when we cannot see it in the dark.