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THE STATE OF JOB

It can often be difficult to understand the meaning of what a person is going through. What appears to be can be very different from the reality. This is well exemplified in the life of Job. In this series of reflections, we will consider the story of Job, gleaning from it important lessons about life.

The story of Job.

The Book of Job is an unusual yet interesting book of the Bible, but one that is not easy to understand or appreciate. Some find it baffling, as it seems to raise more questions than answers.

The story of Job begins with a commendation on Job's character. He was held up as an outstanding example of a righteous and godly man, and someone deeply appreciated by God. He worshipped God sincerely and scrupulously.

Unknown to him, dark storm clouds were gathering. One day, in the heavenly realm, an event occurred that would have a profound impact on his life. Satan came before God and cast serious doubts about the genuineness of Job's faith in God. He instigated a challenge to test and reveal Job's faith for what it was. With God's permission, Satan surprised Job with a succession of attacks that devastated his family and estate, and brought him untold personal misery.

In the midst of his trials, Job's friends came to stand by him. There were several rounds of speeches, with each of his friends taking turns to speak his mind and share his understanding of the plight that Job was in. Job countered with his own reasoning and arguments and in the process vented his complaints from a vexed spirit. He made highly improper remarks that attributed wrongdoing to God and contained false allegations against God.

These events culminated in two long speeches by God, resulting in Job repenting and worshipping God and being restored to a position of blessedness and plenty.

Questions that confront us

As we read through the Book of Job, a host of troubling questions may surface in our minds for which there are no ready answers.

- Why did God allow Satan to attack Job so severely? Why did God allow Job to suffer so terribly? Is there any meaning to what Job went through? Was God having a game, a wager with Satan, and was Job used as a mere pawn?
- The Scriptures holds Job up as a positive example for us in Ezekiel 14:14 and James 5:11 and God spoke very favourably of him, saying Job spoke of Him what is right (Job 42:7-8). Yet it is also recorded that God rebuked Job for his highly improper remarks about Him. How do we reconcile these contrasting and seemingly contradictory aspects in the story of Job?
- Did Job fare well during the trials? Was God pleased with him?
- In what areas did Job falter? Why did he falter? Were they serious? If Job's failures were serious, why was he commended by God and held up in the Scriptures as a positive example? If they were not serious, why did God rebuke him in strong terms?
- Was Satan triumphant?
- When God answered Job, why did He do so in that way? Did God's reply answer the questions that perplexed and disturbed Job? If it did, how did God's answer address them? If not, how were Job's problems resolved? Why did Job not receive the answers to some of his pertinent questions even at the end of the story of Job?
- What significant lessons can we learn from this book?

Some Christians may say that the Book of Job confirms one point—that the problem of pain and suffering in this world is beyond our understanding. They may say that Christians can only take comfort in the Cross, which assures us of God's love and care for us.

However, thoughtful study and prayerful consideration of this book can reward us with rich and satisfying spiritual treasures of profound truths that can help us greatly in our walk with God. The Lord willing, we will ponder over these issues and find answers to these troubling questions.

The story of Job can be appreciated from different angles. For a start, we will approach it from the angle of trying to understand Job *before, during* and *after* the trials that he went through. We will observe Job's analysis of his own situation, what others thought of him and how they treated him, and we will examine the true state of affairs.

Before the trials

The Book of Job opens with very positive statements about the character of this man.

Job 1:1-3

- 1 There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil.
- 2 Seven sons and three daughters were born to him.
- 3 His possessions also were 7, 000 sheep, 3, 000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys, and very many servants; and that man was the greatest of all the men of the east.

Exemplary character

The Scriptures pronounces Job an exemplary character, a man who was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil. He had a big family, was wealthy, and God blessed him with an abundance of material possessions. He also had a good reputation and was the greatest man of the east.

God Himself used these very striking words when He spoke about Job:

Job 1:8

The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil."

God specifically singled Job out in His conversation with Satan as one who lived an exemplary life. The qualities in Job are what God looks for in men—blamelessness and uprightness of character, one who knows what it means to properly fear God and who turns away from evil.

Religious man

Job 1:5 shows that Job was also careful with religious observances.

Job 1:5

When the days of feasting had completed their cycle, Job would send and consecrate them, rising up early in the morning and offering burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, "Perhaps my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually.

From the context, it is clear that these were not merely external observances. Job not only longed in his heart for what was good, he was also careful to observe and do what he recognised he should.

Intimate friendship with God

Some time later, Job entered a period in his life in which he was in intense difficulties and pain. During that time, he recounted his relationship with God before the trials came upon him.

Job 29:2-5

2 "Oh that I were as in months gone by,
As in the days when God watched over me;
3 When His lamp shone over my head,
And by His light I walked through darkness;
4 As I was in the prime of my days,
When the friendship of God was over my tent;
5 When the Almighty was yet with me,
And my children were around me;

From these verses, we can see how intimate Job's relationship with God was. He was conscious of God's presence with him and goodness towards him. He knew that God cared for him and watched over him. He was faithful in his walk with God and he walked by God's light. Job felt then that he was in the prime of his days.

Job testified that God regarded him as a friend. The Scriptures records only a few instances of those considered as God's friends. Abraham was one and Moses, another. Their relationship with God was very intimate. It was said of Moses that "the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend" (Ex. 33:11). According to the Hebrew lexicon, the word in the Hebrew text translated "friendship" in Job 29:4 may be translated as "intimate friendship" and is translated in this way in the New International Version. This is all the more remarkable when we consider the fact that Job lived long ago. God's revelation to the people of his time would generally be far less than what we have today.

God's blessings, Job's righteous ways and social status

In Job 29:6-11, Job went on to describe in graphic terms the richness of his life and God's provision for him. He also recalled the reputation he had with others.

Job 29:6-11

6 When my steps were bathed in butter,
And the rock poured out for me streams of oil!
7 "When I went out to the gate of the city,
When I took my seat in the square,
8 The young men saw me and hid themselves,
And the old men arose and stood.
9 "The princes stopped talking
And put their hands on their mouths;
10 The voice of the nobles was hushed,

And their tongue stuck to their palate.
11 "For when the ear heard, it called me blessed,
And when the eye saw, it gave witness of me,

In Job 29:12-17, he went on to describe his attitude, his ways and his life. He cared for others and was helpful to the needy and the oppressed. He was concerned about justice and intervened on behalf of those who were unjustly treated.

Job 29:12-17

12 Because I delivered the poor who cried for help,
And the orphan who had no helper.
13 "The blessing of the one ready to perish came upon me,
And I made the widow's heart sing for joy.
14 "I put on righteousness, and it clothed me;
My justice was like a robe and a turban.
15 "I was eyes to the blind
And feet to the lame.
16 "I was a father to the needy,
And I investigated the case which I did not know.
17 "I broke the jaws of the wicked
And snatched the prey from his teeth.

In Job 29:21-25, we see how others respected his counsel and his words. There was a certain authority and position that he held before their eyes. He even sat as chief among them.

Job 29:21-25

21 "To me they listened and waited,
And kept silent for my counsel.
22 "After my words they did not speak again,
And my speech dropped on them.
23 "They waited for me as for the rain,
And opened their mouth as for the spring rain.
24 "I smiled on them when they did not believe,
And the light of my face they did not cast down.
25 "I chose a way for them and sat as chief,
And dwelt as a king among the troops,
As one who comforted the mourners.

This, then, was the kind of situation Job lived in before the trials descended on him. God blessed him materially and was watching over his life in obvious ways. He enjoyed a good reputation among men. Because the appearance and the reality were in the same direction, Job himself could easily recognise that he was in favour with God. So could others.

If someone were to ask us how a person in such a situation is getting on, I believe our reply would be, "He is fine" and, "He is getting on wonderfully." If the person himself were asked the same question, the answer would invariably be the same.

During the trials

Now let us consider the trials that came upon him. During the trials, the picture appears very pathetic. Suddenly, his possessions, his wealth and his sons and daughters were all taken away. He was reduced to poverty and pain. He was severely afflicted in the body and he suffered emotionally and mentally too.

Loss of possessions and children

Calamities rained upon him in quick succession. We read this in Job 1:13-19.

Job 1:13-19

13 Now on the day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house,

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

15 and the Sabeans attacked and took them. They also slew 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 and made a raid on the camels and took them and slew 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 your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house,

19 and behold, 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 died, and I alone have escaped to tell you."

The Sabeans and Chaldeans attacked and took away his oxen, donkeys and camels. They slew his servants mercilessly. The "fire of God", a likely reference to lightning, struck and burned up the sheep and the servants. That was not all. Even his son's house collapsed, burying his sons and daughters. All these happened in a very dramatic way. In a flash, his possessions, wealth and his children were all gone.

Bodily afflictions

Not only that, we read in Job 2:7-8 that Job began to suffer very severely from bodily afflictions of sore boils.

Job 2:7-8

7 Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.

8 And he took a potsherd to scrape himself while he was sitting among the ashes.

You can imagine how difficult a situation it must have been for Job. From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head, he was afflicted with sore boils. He sat among the ashes, scraping his wounds and was in very great pain. We see a very pathetic picture of personal suffering in Job 7:4-5.

Job 7:4-5

4 "When I lie down I say,
'When shall I arise?'

But the night continues,
And I am continually tossing until dawn.

5 "My flesh is clothed with worms and a crust of dirt,
My skin hardens and runs.

Ostracised by society and those he loved turned against him

Adding to his pain was the treatment he received from his friends, relatives and servants as he narrated in Job 19:13-16.

Job 19:13-16

13 "He has removed my brothers far from me,
And my acquaintances are completely estranged from me.

14 "My relatives have failed,
And my intimate friends have forgotten me.

15 "Those who live in my house and my maids consider me a stranger.
I am a foreigner in their sight.

16 "I call to my servant, but he does not answer;
I have to implore him with my mouth.

As Job no longer appeared to be blessed by God, but instead seemed to be under the judgement of God, his relatives no longer cared for him in the same way as before. His intimate friends had forgotten him in spite of all the good that he had done for them in the past. Even his own servants had no respect for him.

Seeing his physical state, his wife and brothers loathed him, and even children and his associates turned against him, as we read in Job 19:17-19.

Job 19:17-19

17 "My breath is offensive to my wife,
And I am loathsome to my own brothers.

18 "Even young children despise me;
I rise up and they speak against me.

19 "All my associates abhor me,
And those I love have turned against me.

Instead of bringing comfort, the very people whom he loved were against him. They added to his pain, making it more difficult for him to bear with the situation. There seemed to be no one who offered him true comfort at this time of great trial and need.

Undoubtedly, Job was going through a very difficult time. He was despised and mocked, even by those who were despised and rejected by society. In Job 29, Job recounted how God blessed and undertook for him in various ways obvious to all and the great respect others had for him, but now, in Job 30, he painted a picture of contrast and began with a "But".

Job 30:1-10

1 "But now those younger than I mock me,
Whose fathers I disdained to put with the dogs of my flock.
2 "Indeed, what good was the strength of their hands to me?
Vigor had perished from them.
3 "From want and famine they are gaunt
Who gnaw the dry ground by night in waste and desolation,
4 Who pluck mallow by the bushes,
And whose food is the root of the broom shrub.
5 "They are driven from the community;
They shout against them as against a thief,
6 So that they dwell in dreadful valleys,
In holes of the earth and of the rocks.
7 "Among the bushes they cry out;
Under the nettles they are gathered together.
8 "Fools, even those without a name,
They were scourged from the land.
9 "And now I have become their taunt,
I have even become a byword to them.
10 "They abhor me and stand aloof from me,
And they do not refrain from spitting at my face.

Lack of support from his wife

Even his wife was not understanding or supportive towards him. It would have made a great difference to Job had his wife stood by him and encouraged him to be true to God. But instead we read in Job 2:9 that his wife did the opposite.

Job 2:9

Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!"

Misunderstood by his three friends

In Job 2:11, we read that Job's three friends came to him with the express purpose of sympathising and comforting him.

Job 2:11

Now when Job's three friends heard of all this adversity that had come upon him, they came each one from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite; and they made an appointment together to come to sympathize with him and comfort him.

But instead of comforting him, they spoke words that hurt. These were some hurting words that Eliphaz, one of his three friends, spoke:

Job 22:4-11

4 "Is it because of your reverence that He reproves you,
That He enters into judgment against you?
5 "Is not your wickedness great,
And your iniquities without end?
6 "For you have taken pledges of your brothers without cause,
And stripped men naked.
7 "To the weary you have given no water to drink,
And from the hungry you have withheld bread.
8 "But the earth belongs to the mighty man,
And the honorable man dwells in it.
9 "You have sent widows away empty,
And the strength of the orphans has been crushed.
10 "Therefore snares surround you,
And sudden dread terrifies you,
11 Or darkness, so that you cannot see,
And an abundance of water covers you.

Seeing the condition that Job was in, and the calamities that came upon him, they misunderstood him and accused him of wrongdoing and sin. They wrongly concluded that God was judging him for his wickedness and his sins.

What they said about Job is a contrast to what we saw earlier, that Job was someone who cared for others and that God had pronounced him a blameless and upright man, one who feared God and who turned away from evil.

Such false accusations from friends, especially during times like these, must have been extremely difficult to bear. His friends attributed to him things that were not true. Their words tormented and crushed Job.

Job 19:2-3

2 "How long will you torment me
And crush me with words?

3 "These ten times you have insulted me;
You are not ashamed to wrong me.

They could have helped and encouraged him and given him solace, but they did not. Their words provided no comfort at all.

Job 16:2-5

2 "I have heard many such things;
Sorry comforters are you all.
3 "Is there no limit to windy words?
Or what plagues you that you answer?
4 "I too could speak like you,
If I were in your place.
I could compose words against you
And shake my head at you.
5 "I could strengthen you with my mouth,
And the solace of my lips could lessen your pain.

Job's friends assumed that there must have been wrongdoing on Job's part because of what was happening to him, and they made assertions about his sins and how God was now judging him. How they wronged Job at this time of his greatest need!

What we see taking place between Job and his three friends serves as a caution to us. We must be very careful not to wrong others, bearing in mind that, at times, reality can be very different from appearance. Thus, in situations that are more complex and difficult to understand, we must be slow to conclude and not be overconfident in our assessment.

Job thought God was against him and afflicting him

But what was perhaps most difficult for Job, a God-fearing and righteous man, was his perception that God was against him, and that he seemed unable to reach out to God and to sense His fellowship and grace upon his life. Knowing the presence of God and His favour and grace is vital for a person to go through a time like this well.

Job thought that the calamities that came upon him were arrows of the Almighty and that God was against him (Job 6:4). He thought that he was the target of God (Job 7:20), that God was angry with him (Job 19:11) and was persecuting him (Job 30:21).

Job 6:4

"For the arrows of the Almighty are within me,
Their poison my spirit drinks;
The terrors of God are arrayed against me.

Job 7:20

"Have I sinned? What have I done to You,

O watcher of men?
Why have You set me as Your target,
So that I am a burden to myself?

Job 19:11

"He has also kindled His anger against me
And considered me as His enemy.

Job 30:21

"You have become cruel to me;
With the might of Your hand You persecute me.

In his own mind, Job did not think that his suffering was because of his sin. Yet he found there was no way out for him. All the people around him were against him. They misunderstood and condemned him. He also felt that God was against him, yet he could not sort it out with God. His cry to God was met with silence and that left him in a helpless state.

Job 30:20

"I cry out to You for help, but You do not answer me;
I stand up, and You turn Your attention against me.

Job wanted to know why God was afflicting him in this way. As far as he knew, it could not be that God was judging him for his sins. He was perplexed and wanted to reason out and discuss with God what was happening to him (Job 23:3-4). But he could not find God (Job 23:8). It would appear that at that time, Job and his friends did not understand the existence and work of Satan and they believed that Job's misfortune came from God.

Job 23:3, 4, 8

3 "Oh that I knew where I might find Him,
That I might come to His seat!
4 "I would present my case before Him
And fill my mouth with arguments.
8 "Behold, I go forward but He is not there,
And backward, but I cannot perceive Him;

Indeed, a situation like what Job was facing can be very frustrating, discouraging and difficult. Who could he turn to in his moment of need? He did not understand the meaning of what he was going through. Worse still, he also misunderstood this very crucial issue, thinking that God was against him, which we know was not true.

The point we should take careful note of is this: it is not only others who may fail to understand what we are going through, but we ourselves may not understand accurately or may even misunderstand what we are going through.

Our assessment of such situations

If someone were to ask us how a person going through such times is getting on, I think most of us would say without hesitation, "Terrible!" If the person going through such trials were asked the same question, his answer would likely be no different. But is this way of thinking correct? Why do we say "terrible"? What is our perspective? Why do we tend to answer in this way when we go through such situations?

After the trials

We will now consider briefly what happened after the trials. The passage in Job 42:7-8 tells us that after the trials, Job was commended and vindicated by the Lord Himself.

Job 42:7-8

7 It came about after the Lord had spoken these words to Job, that the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has.

8 "Now therefore, take for yourselves seven bulls and seven rams, and go to My servant Job, and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves, and My servant Job will pray for you. For I will accept him so that I may not do with you according to your folly, because you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has."

We can make two observations from these verses: Firstly, Job's three friends were in the wrong and secondly, God actually appreciated Job. On the whole, God was pleased with him even though, as we shall see later, Job was not faultless. God said that Job's friends had not spoken of Him what was right as Job had. Besides, God told them to go to Job and offer burnt offerings for themselves and that Job would pray for them.

God also restored the fortunes of Job and blessed the latter days of Job more than the beginning. His material possessions increased twofold (Job 42:10-12). He had another seven sons and three daughters, and lived to a ripe old age (Job 42:16-17). Thus, we see that God commended, vindicated and appreciated Job.

After the trials, the picture of Job's life is more obvious. If we were asked how a person in such a situation is getting on, the likely answer we would give is "Fine" or "Good". If the person himself were asked such a question, his answer would not be any different.

Appearance and reality

When appearance and reality match

We can see that before and after the trials, it was easy for others to recognise that Job was blessed and that he had God's approval, that God's favour was upon his life and he was faring well. Because the appearance and reality were similar, it was easy for others to recognise this fact.

When appearance and reality do not match

But during the trials, the appearance was vastly different from the reality. It was difficult for others to understand what was taking place and how Job was faring. The people around him asserted quite confidently that he was not faring well. They thought that he was not in God's favour and that he was being judged and punished by God for his sins. Even Job himself misunderstood the situation, thinking that God was against him.

The point for us to note is this, that when the outward circumstances are unfavourable for a person, there is a tendency to conclude that he is not faring well.

The reality during the trials

But what was the reality in that situation? To answer this, we can ask ourselves two questions: Firstly, did the calamities and trials come upon Job because God was unhappy with him and disapproved of his life? Secondly, was Job in a bad state and faring badly during the trials?

Did the trials come upon Job because God disapproved of his life?

It is clear that this was not the case. In reality, the opposite was true. The trials came upon Job because of his righteousness and God's appreciation of him. God had such confidence in Job that He allowed Satan to put him to the test. The passage Job 1:8-12 shows clearly how the machinery was set in motion, how Job came under the trials.

Job 1:8-12

8 The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil."

9 Then Satan answered the Lord, "Does Job fear God for nothing?"

10 "Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.

11 "But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face."

12 Then the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him." So Satan departed from the presence of the Lord.

We see from this passage that Satan challenged God's pronouncement on Job's character. By questioning "Does Job fear God for nothing?" he was in effect saying that Job's fear of God and his apparent good conduct had no real quality in them. He responded well merely because God had been blessing him materially, making a hedge around him, protecting him and blessing the work of his hands. Everything was going on well for Job, and his outward circumstances were favourable and pleasant.

Satan went on to spitefully say that if God were to put forth His hand and touch all that Job had, that is, if his surroundings and possessions were all adversely affected, Job would surely curse God to His face. In other words, there was no real quality in Job's love for God and in his fear of God. In the face of this challenge, God was willing to let Satan put Job to the test (v. 12) because He knew that there was substance in Job's life; there were genuine, good qualities within him.

The first test was one in which God allowed Satan to afflict Job in relation to what he had. But God placed a limit on what Satan was allowed to do: he could not touch Job in his personal being.

Although his possessions and his sons and daughters were taken away, Job continued to respond positively, worshipping the Lord (Job 1:20-22). With that response, Satan was not pleased. Because Job had weathered the first test unscathed, Satan wanted to go further and afflict Job in his body. Satan then said, "Put forth Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse You to Your face" (Job 2:5). God had sufficient confidence in Job to allow Satan to afflict him in his body, but did not allow Satan to take away his life. God said, "Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life" (Job 2:6).

Some may wonder why God allowed Satan to afflict Job so severely and make him suffer so much.

It is helpful to pause here and reflect so that we can better appreciate the life of Job and the meaning of what he was going through, and to realise that his pain and suffering were not in vain.

There is a critical issue involved here, which is vital to the fulfilment of God's eternal purpose. The issue is:

Can man develop genuine, deep moral qualities within and have genuine, deep love for God and the truth, independent of and whatever the outward circumstances?

Do we really love God and the truth and seek to live accordingly at all times, or do we do so only when it is convenient, when the circumstances are easy or because of God's blessings that we can enjoy? Can man develop such qualities and maintain them even in the midst of adverse circumstances?

Not only that, it is also very important for us to consider *the degree to which we can develop such qualities*. What is the degree of the quality of life, character and moral stature that we have attained? These are important issues. God values these qualities in man and they are very important in His kingdom.

Furthermore, we should note that the difficulties that Job went through, although very severe and trying, need not have negative effects upon him in the area that really matters, and that is, the moral and spiritual quality of his being. Instead, they could help him in his personal development. And as we reflect upon it, we can justifiably conclude that Job did emerge from the trials a wiser and more mature man, as we shall see subsequently.

However, if we simply look at the difficulties from the angle of pain and suffering, we may say, "It is a terrible picture" and wonder why God allowed Satan to afflict Job in that way.

We may also wonder at times why we have to go through severe testing and trials. Let us learn from the story of Job, that the difficulties and pain we go through need not have negative effects upon us and we do not have to go through them in vain. We can emerge a better person. But in many of our contexts, there are other issues to consider, for example, whether the difficulties we go through are a result of our own failures and weaknesses.

Was Job faring badly during the trials?

We will now consider the second question: "Was Job in a bad state, and faring badly during the trials?"

On the whole, God was pleased with Job and how he went through the ordeal. Job was not in a bad state, though others looking at his outward circumstances and hearing some of the words he uttered might have thought that he was. His three friends were angry with him. And while others around him despised and condemned him, we have seen that God commended, vindicated and blessed him more than at the beginning.

Having said that, I want to point out that Job did falter to some degree during the trials. For example, in Job 3, we read that Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. He wished he had not been born. He felt that it was meaningless being born if he had to suffer in this way. Although the trials were very difficult, such an attitude was not right. We read of his complaints in Job 3:11, 20:

Job 3:11, 20

11 "Why did I not die at birth,
Come forth from the womb and expire?
20 "Why is light given to him who suffers,
And life to the bitter of soul,

He felt that it would have been better if he had just died at birth. He also faltered, as indicated in several passages, for example, Job 9:20-24, 10:1-3, 19:6, 10, 11 and 21:4. We shall continue to examine in greater detail how serious his failures were in subsequent messages of our reflections on Job.

The other point to note is that although God commended, vindicated and blessed Job, He did not ignore his failures but addressed them in Job 40:1-2 and Job 40:6-8.

Job 40:1-2

1 Then the Lord said to Job,
2 "Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty?
Let him who reproves God answer it."

Job 40:6-8

6 Then the Lord answered Job out of the storm and said,
7 "Now gird up your loins like a man;
I will ask you, and you instruct Me.
8 "Will you really annul My judgment?
Will you condemn Me that you may be justified?"

It is clear from the way God spoke here that He was not totally pleased with Job. Some of Job's remarks were clearly improper and he himself subsequently acknowledged that this was so. He retracted them and repented.

Job 42:3, 5, 6

3 'Who is this that hides counsel with knowledge?'
"Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand,
Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."
5 "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear;
But now my eye sees You;
6 Therefore I retract,
And I repent in dust and ashes."

However, we need to recognise that the significance and blameworthiness of Job's failures should be considered in the context of the severity and intensity of the afflictions and trials that he was going through.

God considers all relevant factors

There is an important principle for us to take note. As in the case with Job, when assessing the significance and blameworthiness of a person's failures, God does take

into consideration the severity and intensity of the trials and afflictions, and all the relevant factors in operation in the given context. We need to bear this principle in mind for our own lives and those of others.

In Job's context, we saw how his possessions were all taken away and destroyed so quickly, one after another. His sons and daughters died. He was severely attacked by the evil one from many angles and suffered intense physical, mental, emotional and spiritual pressure and pain. It must have been very difficult for him to bear. He was misunderstood, taunted, mocked and wrongly accused of wrongdoing. It is evident that the evil one was taking advantage of the adverse circumstances that Job was in and was attacking him in his spirit. We see an indication of this dimension of spiritual attack in Job 17:1.

Job 17:1

"My spirit is broken, my days are extinguished,
The grave is ready for me.

Here, Job lamented, "My spirit is broken." There is a sense of brokenness of spirit that is positive, that is, when it refers to contriteness of spirit. But this is not the sense meant here. The meaning here is that Job was harassed, and he felt difficult and was negatively affected in his spirit. He expressed it as "anguish of my spirit" in Job 7:11:

Job 7:11

"Therefore I will not restrain my mouth;
I will speak in the anguish of my spirit,
I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.

Job 7:14 tells us of the frightening dreams and terrifying visions that he had.

Job 7:14

Then You dost frighten me with dreams
And terrify me by visions;

Job believed that it was God who frightened him with dreams and terrified him by visions, which was a grave misunderstanding. However, Job was probably right in thinking that what he was experiencing had a supernatural source. It was very likely the work of the powers of darkness. This manner of attack on Job orchestrated by Satan was within the scope of what God had permitted Satan. We see that Job's various faculties were being oppressed and attacked in many different aspects. He was going through a very difficult time indeed.

And as we have noted earlier, Job was unaware that Satan was afflicting him and therefore he wrongly concluded that God was against him. Though he tried, he seemed unable to reach out to and sort things out with God. He could not sense God's approval and fellowship, nor His presence and enabling. For someone like Job who deeply loved the Lord and the truth, his wrong conclusion that God was against

him and the silence of God would probably be the most difficult and painful aspects of his experience. This was further compounded by the fact that there was no one who encouraged and supported him at this time. Thus, it must have been very difficult for Job to exercise his will to choose to carry on in the truth, and in faith, trusting God.

Job's positive qualities

Several verses in the Book of Job indicate to us that there were significant positive inward qualities in Job, even while he was perplexed and suffering intensely in this way. Let us take a look at some of these verses.

Immediately after all the calamities that came upon him, with his sons and daughters having all died, and his possessions and wealth all gone, we read in Job 1:20-22:

Job 1:20-22

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

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

22 Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.

Job did not grumble, murmur or blame God at this stage. Instead, he worshipped God in the midst of intense suffering. This is something very remarkable. In spite of the fact that he wrongly thought that God had taken away so much of what was precious to him, when in fact it was Satan at work, he trusted in God's sovereignty and continued to bless the name of the Lord.

Later on, we read in Job 2:9-10 that when he was afflicted with boils and was in very great pain, his wife instigated him to "curse God and die". But Job chided her for speaking foolishly.

Job 2:9-10

9 Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!"

10 But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Though he mistakenly thought that God was the One who was afflicting him, he still put it this way, "Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" We see from here that Job's attitude to life was that he would accept everything, even difficulties and afflictions, that God saw fit to come upon his life. This attitude revealed the quality of his love for the Lord and faithfulness to God.

In chapter 6, verse 10, Job said:

Job 6:10

"But it is still my consolation,
And I rejoice in unsparing pain,
That I have not denied the words of the Holy One.

In his deep pain, Job basically remained true to God and to what he had come to understand from God. Though he faltered, he still loved the Lord and sought to honour God and to abide by His words. Some of the things that he said in these verses might not be accurate or wholesome, but basically they were in the right direction and they revealed some of the deep things in his heart.

Job 13:15, 18

15 "Though He slay me, I will hope in Him.
Nevertheless I will argue my ways before Him.
18 "Behold now, I have prepared my case;
I know that I will be vindicated.

No matter what happened to him, even if God were to slay him, he said, "I will hope in Him." Though Job did waver during the trials, deep in his heart he still had confidence and hope in God, which he affirmed from time to time. He could not understand why he should be afflicted in that way and he wanted to argue his case before God, but in the end he still trusted and hoped in God. He knew that he would be vindicated in the end. He had the confidence that God is reliable and just, although, at that moment, he did not quite understand how to sort it all out.

Job 16:19

"Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven,
And my advocate is on high.

Although many people did not understand him and they despised and wronged him, Job knew that he had a witness in heaven and that he could appeal to his advocate on high. This showed his confidence in God in spite of the fact that he could not properly reconcile what was happening to and around him. As was pointed out before, we must remember that these events happened in the context of Job's limited understanding.

We see in Job 23:3-7 further evidence of his faith in God.

Job 23:3-7

3 "Oh that I knew where I might find Him,
That I might come to His seat!
4 "I would present my case before Him
And fill my mouth with arguments.
5 "I would learn the words which He would answer,
And perceive what He would say to me.
6 "Would He contend with me by the greatness of His power?
No, surely He would pay attention to me.

7 "There the upright would reason with Him;
And I would be delivered forever from my Judge.

Though he sought for God and seemed unable to find Him, yet he still believed in Him. He knew that God would not overcome or condemn him simply because He is more powerful.

Job believed that God would pay attention to him if he had genuine grounds to present his case before the Lord. He knew that if a person is upright, he could reason with God (v. 7). He also knew that God is not an arbitrary God who deals with men without any proper basis. He still held on to the belief that God is reasonable and would vindicate and deliver him. Despite all that was going on, he still clung on to his belief that God is a good and reliable God who would deliver the upright.

We see this train of thought again in Job 23.

Job 23:10-12

10 "But He knows the way I take;
When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.
11 "My foot has held fast to His path;
I have kept His way and not turned aside.
12 "I have not departed from the command of His lips;
I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.

Job affirmed his conviction that God knows what was going on and what was in his heart. Though he did not understand the work of Satan and felt that God was testing him, he still believed that because his attitudes were basically good, God understood him and that he would emerge better than before. He knew that in going through all these, he "shall come forth as gold", meaning that everything would turn out for good in the end. He knew he would come forth a better person, refined like gold, of precious value.

And he went on to say in verses 11 and 12 that he still walked in the way he believed God wanted him to, not turning aside from it. He still treasured the words of God, seeking to be faithful to God and not departing from His commandments. He valued the words of God more than his necessary food. This then was the kind of attitude within Job basically, although there were indications of failures and wavering within him, which we will be examining more carefully in subsequent messages.

What we have considered helps us to understand that what is precious and of primary importance to God is the quality of our inner man. It is not merely the external conduct or the words from our mouth, but the qualities that are within us that matter.

Concluding remarks

We have seen that though there was evidence of failures, on the whole, Job fared rather well, and God was pleased with him. Of course, he could have fared better. But given the context that he was in, God was still pleased with him.

In Ezekiel 14:14, Job is held up as one of three examples of men of righteousness with whom God is pleased. We have already seen earlier in the Book of Job itself how God had commended and vindicated him. Here, in the Book of Ezekiel, God wanted to highlight people who were righteous, whom He was pleased with. The context here is about a nation sinning and how God was stretching out his hand against the nation to destroy it, and in verse 14 God said,

Ezekiel 14:14

even though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job were in its midst, by their own righteousness they could only deliver themselves," declares the Lord God.

The verse opens with the phrase "even though" to emphasise the outstanding moral qualities of these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job. Even though these three men were outstanding in the quality of righteousness, they could only deliver themselves, not the sinful nation they were in the midst of.

Noah was singled out in a time of widespread wickedness, corruption and violence on this earth. God judged and destroyed the world by flood, but Noah was highlighted as a man who "found favor in the eyes of the Lord", "a righteous man, blameless in his time", one who "walked with God" (Gen. 6:5-11). Daniel was described as a "man of high esteem" (Dan. 10:11), a man whom God was very pleased with for his attitude, character and life. Likewise Job, the man we are now considering, was described as an upright and blameless man.

When James in his epistle discusses the subject of patience in the midst of trials, he refers to Job as an outstanding example of one who endured and was blessed.

James 5:11

We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.

In this verse, James is not referring to those who endured trials in the sense of just managing to go through them, but those who had gone through them well. They are the ones who are blessed. Job is highlighted because what he went through was extremely difficult, and yet on the whole, he came through it well.

In the light of what we have considered of Job, what he went through and how he went through it, what should be the answer to the question "How was he getting on?" Should we say, "Terrible!?" We tend to answer this way because of the

difficulties and adverse circumstances that come upon a person. But the reality is that Job fared rather well in the midst of all the trials and difficulties. To answer "terrible" would not be an appropriate answer.

If we respond in this way, it is clear that we need to adjust our perspective in life and the way we view things. Our focus should not be on the things that come upon us, even though they may be very unpleasant and difficult. Instead, we should focus on the inward qualities within the person, his response to the situation and the choices he makes. The situation may be difficult, but it could also be an important time of learning and positive development. This is how God regards us and views the situation and this is what counts.

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