

“Remaining True”
Job 11:1-6, 18:1-7, 19:19-27, 27:1-6, 40:6-8
John 16:1-11

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He didn't deserve it.

If you were here a couple of weeks ago, I was talking about Jacob and his father Isaac, and Jacob's friend Nathan. Nathan had gotten hurt. The story was that a horse cart came around the corner too fast and caught Nathan and hit him, so he was hurt. He hadn't done anything to deserve it. So Jacob is now asking his father, “He didn't deserve it. Why did this happen?”

Isaac might say, “Well you've come a ways. Now that you've spent time with Nathan and quit blaming him for what happened to him, you can hear his story and you can enter in to the concern and the struggle he has.”

“But why, Father? Why did it happen?”

You know, as we come to a book like Job, it's often the question that surrounds that book. Why? Why did it happen? What's going on? We hear in the very beginning how the Tempter tells God that Job will give up on him if things go badly for him. In fact, he comes back a second time and says, “It was an initial test. You need to do more.” So things get even worse.

The story we hear is about how Job's friends blame him for what has happened to him. The idea is that if something bad happens, somebody must have deserved it. But Job is a story where we don't see him deserving it. Why does he deserve it?

We know the world is like this. Not everything that happens is because somebody deserves it. Accidents happen. The influence of others can cause things to happen. Something can happen because somebody else has done something. We recognize that the world doesn't always happen because somebody deserved it.

Perhaps there might be a reason, but Job doesn't know what it is. Isaac used this with Jacob to talk about how to work through this frustration that things don't always happen the way we think they should. It doesn't always seem that what deserves to happen, happens and sometimes what doesn't deserve to happen, happens. Maybe we could go on to say that in a number of other ways and make it really confusing.

What Isaac might tell Jacob, for example, is, “Maybe you don't know why it happened, but look at Job's story. What can we learn from him as he goes through this? First, he recognizes that his friends are wrong. He didn't do anything wrong. He lives in that place of double suffering, in a way. He's suffering physically. He's lost all his stuff, and he's lost all his friends. He says, “Everybody whom I've loved is looking at me with judgment and blame.” He goes on to make one of those amazing statements coming out of scripture. Job is in the middle of being as bad off as it can be—personal suffering, being sick, having nothing, having lost everything, all his friends are gone,

destitute. And what does he say? “I wish my words could be immortalized because I know that my Redeemer lives and someday shall stand upon the earth.”

I find that an incredibly hard thing to say. When I’m in the middle of being really sick, it’s hard for me to think anything positive about the world sometimes. And yet, here is Job, the example of one who has lost everything, who is feeling terrible, being able to say, “I know there is still hope.” We don’t often think about Job as a book of hope, but I think it is. It’s hope in the midst of darkness that Job shows us.

The second thing that he does is about being focused, because he’s lost everything and it’s a time when he could give up. In fact, fairly early on his wife says, “Why don’t you just curse God and die?” Basically he says, “I will not do that.” He has that hope that his Redeemer lives. The second thing he says is, “I will not lose my integrity. I will hold onto my righteousness.” Integrity is the idea of moral uprightness. “I will continue to try to do what’s right. Even though I feel terrible, I will not be a terrible person.” I think that’s hard to do.

“I will not lose sight of righteousness. Those people who don’t love me anymore?” It feels like he’s saying, “I’m not going to quit loving them. I will hold on to my righteousness.” That’s incredible. He says, “As long as the breath of God is within me, I will hold onto my integrity and my righteousness—my desire to do what is right; my desire to stay in right relationship.”

If anybody goes through hell, Job does; and yet he holds on. If you notice, in the very beginning, that’s what the Tempter told God Job would not be able to do. He would not be able to hold onto his integrity and his righteousness.

It is a reality that life does not always give us what we want. Things don’t always happen the way we expect they should. People get something they don’t deserve—an illness, a struggle. We all walk through the valley of the shadow of death at some point in our lives. But he holds on to hope. He holds on to his integrity, his righteousness.

You see, I think Jesus is talking about the same thing. What he says is, “I want to teach you about this so that you don’t stumble when things get hard.” My struggle is that I want to say, “Jesus, just don’t let things get hard!”

I always feel like if I’m suffering or if something is wrong, what did I do wrong? What’s wrong with the world? I’m not sure we always know. Look at Job. He went through that whole thing, and he doesn’t know why. Even after God comes to talk to him, God doesn’t tell him what happened and why. It might be that we could look back and make some guesses. Job said, “I wish this could be written down in stone forever,” and here we are, thousands of years later, reading it. But he never gets that. What he does get is an audience with God. I think we undervalue that. He gets an audience with God. God comes into his life and begins a restoration. He comes into his life and warns the rest of us about being overly judgmental. He comes into his life and restores him, not only in the awe he has of God, but in his own life.

Jesus is also talking about how we are going to walk through those times that are hard, when it is easy to stumble. And so he wants to help us know what it’s about.

Actually Jesus wants to get us to know two things: what it's about, and that we're not alone. One of the things we don't see in Job, but which Jesus invites us to know, is that we have an Advocate, that we're not alone, that God is with us even through the hard times.

Then he finishes by saying, "...and it is about sin, righteousness, and justice." Sin is not doing the will of God. It's what Job didn't do—breaking that relationship with God and going off in a different direction. It's about righteousness, because it's about relationship. Jesus is going to be with the Father. It's about a relationship. It's about our relationships. And it is about justice, just decisions, just judgment because the ruler of the world is condemned. If the ruler of the world is condemned, should we still listen to that ruler? The idea of making right judgment is to recognize that God, the ruler of the world, has condemned and given us a different way—to follow Jesus.

It is, indeed, what I think Jesus is about. He calls us together, he gathers us around the table, he turns us into a family of faith that lifts itself up and supports itself. What Job didn't get to experience was a community that held him up. Think what a difference it would have made for him. We have a community that encourages our integrity and encourages our right relationships and leads us away from sin and into the light of God.

I think it's all about the kinds of ways we can deal with the world, whether it's in the midst of the greatest struggles of our lives or in the greatest moments of our lives. Either one brings temptations to go in directions that might dim our lives or lead us into the light of life. Job is a story that reminds how important it is to hold on.

It is always in the midst of the worst moment that it's the hardest. That's when we have to hold on. But there is another moment. There is a time coming. Job knows that his Redeemer will stand upon the earth. There is a time coming when I believe we will see God. There is a time coming when we will know the wonder of the Advocate moving among us. There is a time coming, and at times, that time is now. At times we hold onto the hope. And in those times, whether it's now or we're looking beyond, it's a time when we hold each other up, we come together around the table, we come and know that our Redeemer lives and one day will stand upon the earth.

So in the midst of the hard times or the good times, let's hold onto our integrity and righteousness, and pray for God to move among us. Amen.