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Sunday Worship 10:45 AM

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Why Do The Innocent Suffer?

No problem is so bewildering as the problem of undeserved suffering. Bereavement, sickness or misfortune suddenly engulfs us; our minds are baffled and our hearts are bowed with grief. The problem is aggravated by the apparent indifference of God. When we pray, the heavens seem silent, even sullen, we cry out in despair with the psalmist, "Why dost Thou stand afar off, O LORD? Why dost Thou hide Thyself in times of troubles?"-Psalm 10:1

The whole book of *Job* is devoted to this problem. Job was wealthy and upright, devoted to God, but he was overtaken by a series of appalling calamities. First he loses all his wealth. Then his sons and daughters are killed in a devastating tornado. Finally he is smitten from head to foot with dreadful, running boils.

He was so disfigured that his friends hardly recognized him. His skin infection itched so fiercely that he took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself. He then sat stricken and forsaken among the ashes.

At first Job met his misfortunes with remarkable courage and patience. "Shall we accept good from God and not accept adversity," he asked. But as the days wore on with no let up he lapsed into an attitude of self-pity. "Let the day perish on which I was born." He became totally absorbed in himself and his sickness. He wanted to plead his case before God, "Oh that I know where I might find Him, that I might come to His seat! I would present my case before Him and fill my mouth with arguments."-Job 23:3-4 He wistfully remembers his former prosperity and strength,-Job 29:2-6 and contrasts with it his present distress,-Job 30:26-31. He cries, "Have pity on me, have pity on me, O you my friends."

Tragedy often makes us embittered, hard and full of self-pity. This attitude towards suffering is counter-productive. It doesn't help us in dealing with our situation. Job's friends proposed self-accusation. To them misfortune was always due to personal sin. They urged him to repent.

Sometimes sin is the cause of suffering, but all suffering is not due to personal sin. Job suffered not because of his sin, but because of his righteousness.-Job 1:8-2:7

Job's young friend Elihu was different from the others. He recommended an attitude of self-discipline. He urges Job to consider the future benefits which might be derived from his sufferings. Elihu says that God sends sufferings, "That He may turn man aside from his conduct and keep man from pride."-Job 33:17 Hebrews 12 says, "God chastens every son whom He receives."

Finally, God addresses Job. He hurls at him a rapid series of bewildering questions: "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the world? Where were you when I enclosed the seas... and I said, thus far you shall come, but no farther, and here your proud waves shall stop." In these questions God set forth His power, wisdom and His providence.

Now, Job is overwhelmed with confusion. He stammers a few words and then lays his hand on his mouth and says no more. God's questions continue for two more chapters. Finally in Job 42:1, Job speaks. He is ashamed of his complaints and criticism. As grievous as his sufferings were he knew that God, being Who He is, had every right to do as He had done. So, Job humbled himself.-Job 42:5-6

God had not answered his questions. He had not unlocked the mystery of suffering. He had simply revealed Himself as the God of power, wisdom and love and asked Job to trust Him. God is concerned with arousing our faith rather than satisfying our curiosity.

We are creatures, He is creator. We are dependent, He is independent. We have only the information He has allowed, He is all wise. We must take life as it comes, He is almighty.

Job learned that when afflictions come, knowing why doesn't bring peace and contentment, but knowing that God is all powerful and all wise and He is in control. Jesus said, "I will never leave you."-Hebrews 13:5 In the midst of his suffering Job states the basis of hope for all who know God. It was this confidence that was strengthened when God confronted him. Job 19:25-27, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see Him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!"