

## SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

Commentary by Michael Sigler

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### Hope Satisfies

Read Job 42:1-10

**Key verse: “I know you can do anything; / no plan of yours can be opposed successfully” (Job 42:2).**

John Wesley, founder of Methodism, said that in the Book of Job there are “many things hard to understand.” The Book of Job is difficult because it deals with such difficult issues: Why do bad things happen to good people? If God is all-good and all-powerful, why does God allow suffering?

Job’s story ends without all of his questions, or ours, being answered. Yet, the Book of Job speaks powerfully to people of faith who face trials and suffering. In my own recent readings of Job, especially Job 42:1-10, these truths stood out:

*We experience God in times of trial and suffering in ways we would never experience God otherwise.* At the end of the Book of Job, Job realizes that through all of his suffering, he has come to know and experience God in powerful ways: “My ears had heard about you, but now my eyes have seen you” (Job 42:5).

Through suffering, what we have heard and learned about God becomes uniquely ours, experientially. For example, we have heard about the difference it can make to have friends and loved ones to support us in times of need. But when we are on a hospital bed struggling for our next breath, the voice and touch of our loved ones become for us the voice and touch of God. We have heard and perhaps believed that “prayer makes a difference.” But in our time of need, we sense that the prayers of God’s people are holding us up in ways we’ll never be able fully to explain or understand. Like Job, we can say, “My ears had heard about you, but now my eyes have seen you.”

“Any patch of sunlight in a wood,” wrote C.S. Lewis, “will show you something about the sun which you could never get from reading books on astronomy.” We experience God in times of trial and suffering in ways we would never experience God otherwise.

*Even though bad things happen, God's ultimate purposes are for good.* In spite of all the terrible things that happened to Job, in the end Job was blessed: “Then the Lord changed Job's fortunes... and the Lord doubled all Job's possessions” (Job 42:10).

Some interpreters feel that the Book of Job ends too neat and tidy—everything that Job had lost is now restored to him. But this ending should not be interpreted to mean that there is always a direct correlation between our behavior and God's reward in this life. In fact, the message of Job disputes the idea that bad things always happen because we've been bad, or vice versa.

Perhaps the ending of Job's story is intended to remind us that, even though bad things sometimes happen to us in this life, God's ultimate purposes are for good. “I know my plans for you, says the Lord, plans for good and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11). “For we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). Even though bad things happen, God's ultimate purposes are for good. So, we can trust Him.

*Our faith has supreme value to God.* Job's ordeal began when Satan charged that Job only followed God because God blessed him. In other words, Satan charged, Job lived righteously only because it paid for him to do so. Take away Job's blessings, Satan told God, and “he will surely curse you to your face” (Job 1:11).

Through his suffering and loss, Job was often dismayed, even at times angry with God. Looking back at his ordeal, Job would say of his doubting questions, “I have indeed spoken about things I didn't understand” (Job 42:3). Yet, through it all, Job refused to “curse God” (Job 2:9). Though Job would never fully understand the reasons for his suffering, the reader of Job can see that Job's faith through his suffering was of supreme value to God.

So it is still, with us: “These [trials] have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Peter 1:7).

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