



Welcome, we are now definitely into autumn, and with the changing of the seasons I thought I'd begin a new study for Sundays, in the Book of Job. Like our reading from Job this morning, in autumn we suffer loss, the loss of daylight, the loss of leaves, and the loss swallows, to name three. So, let's start with a reading from Psalm 84, which mentions the swallow:

How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God. Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, O LORD of hosts, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise!

Mission Praise 1086

Light of the World,
You stepped down into darkness,
Open my eyes, let me see
beauty that made this heart adore You,
hope of a life spent with You.

So here I am to worship,
Here I am to bow down,
Here I am to say that You're my God:
You're altogether lovely,
Altogether worthy,
Altogether wonderful to me.

So here I am to worship...

King of all days,
O so highly exalted,
Glorious in Heaven above,
Humbly You came to the earth You created,
All for love's sake became poor.

And I'll never know
how much it cost
To see my sin
upon that cross.
And I'll never know
how much it cost
To see my sin
upon that cross.

So here I am to worship...

Let's Pray

It is indeed right and good that we bow down before You, our God and the Lord our maker, and to come into your presence with thanksgiving, and to sing your praise with joy and adoration. We offer our worship in season and out of season, whether we are up or down, on the heights of the mountains or in the depths of a dark valley; on solid ground or all at sea. We thank you that through all the changing scenes of life, you remain the same, our rock and our redeemer. As we listen to your word may we not harden our hearts against it, but open our hearts and minds to the truth which can set us free. We confess we are often shackled to the past, past sins, past failures, even past successes, set us free and set our feet on higher ground. Give us a fresh view of Jesus and a deeper resolve to follow him. We ask this in his name and pray the prayer he taught us: Our Father ...

Reading: Job 1: 1-22

There was a man named Job, living in the land of Uz, who worshiped God and was faithful to him. He was a good man, careful not to do anything evil. He had seven sons and three daughters, and owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, one thousand head of cattle, and five hundred donkeys. He also had a large number of servants and was the richest man in the East.

Job's sons used to take turns giving a feast, to which all the others would come, and they always invited their three sisters to join them. The morning after each feast, Job would get up early and offer sacrifices for each of his children in order to purify them.

He always did this because he thought that one of them might have sinned by insulting God unintentionally.

When the day came for the heavenly beings to appear before the Lord, Satan was there among them. The Lord asked him, “What have you been doing?”

Satan answered, “I have been walking here and there, roaming around the earth.”

“Did you notice my servant Job?” the Lord asked. “There is no one on earth as faithful and good as he is. He worships me and is careful not to do anything evil.”

Satan replied, “Would Job worship you if he got nothing out of it? You have always protected him and his family and everything he owns. You bless everything he does, and you have given him enough cattle to fill the whole country. But now suppose you take away everything he has—he will curse you to your face!”

“All right,” the Lord said to Satan, “everything he has is in your power, but you must not hurt Job himself.” So Satan left.

One day when Job's children were having a feast at the home of their oldest brother, a messenger came running to Job. “We were plowing the fields with the oxen,” he said, “and the donkeys were in a nearby pasture. Suddenly the Sabeans attacked and stole them all. They killed every one of your servants except me. I am the only one who escaped to tell you.”

Before he had finished speaking, another servant came and said, “Lightning struck the sheep and the shepherds and killed them all. I am the only one who escaped to tell you.”

Before he had finished speaking, another servant came and said, “Three bands of Chaldean raiders attacked us, took away the camels, and killed all your servants except me. I am the only one who escaped to tell you.”

Before he had finished speaking, another servant came and said, “Your children were having a feast at the home of your oldest son, when a storm swept in from the desert. It blew the house down and killed them all. I am the only one who escaped to tell you.”

Then Job got up and tore his clothes in grief. He shaved his head and threw himself face downward on the ground. He said, “I was born with nothing, and I will die with nothing. The Lord gave, and now he has taken away. May his name be praised!”

In spite of everything that had happened, Job did not sin by blaming God. Amen.

Over the past 18 months or so we have suffered multiple losses as a result of covid: the loss of freedoms, the loss of services, and the loss of time spent with family and friends; many have lost their jobs, lost out on holidays and, of course, lost loved ones, which brings us to Job.

It is said that bad things come in threes, and after he had lost his donkeys and then his sheep and his camels, maybe he thought that was the end of his run of bad luck. But he was wrong: the news came that a wind had struck the house that his children were in, and it had fallen in on them and they were all dead. The truth is that bad news is not limited by any law; we may feel that after a run of bad luck things can only get better, but that isn't necessarily true: if you throw a dice hoping for a 6, after a hundred throws of 1-5 you are no more likely to throw a 6 on the next throw; it's the same with life; a good hand doesn't necessarily follow after we have been dealt three bad ones. But what can be said for sure is, if anyone continues to join in offering praise and thanks to God after an experience of loss, then that is evidence that their heart is in the right place. God blessed Job with many possessions, and Job blessed God when he lost them all, which clearly shows that his faith and confidence was not in his possessions, but in his God.



Reading: Job 2: 1-10

When the day came for the heavenly beings to appear before the Lord again, Satan was there among them. The Lord asked him, “Where have you been?”

Satan answered, “I have been walking here and there, roaming around the earth.”

“Did you notice my servant Job?” the Lord asked. “There is no one on earth as faithful and good as he is. He worships me and is careful not to do anything evil. You persuaded me to let you attack him for no reason at all, but Job is still as faithful as ever.”

Satan replied, “A person will give up everything in order to stay alive. But now suppose you hurt his body—he will curse you to your face!”

So the Lord said to Satan, “All right, he is in your power, but you are not to kill him.”

Then Satan left the Lord's presence and made sores break out all over Job's body. Job went and sat by the garbage dump and took a piece of broken pottery to scrape his sores. His wife said to him, “You are still as faithful as ever, aren't you? Why don't you curse God and die?”

Job answered, “You are talking nonsense! When God sends us something good, we welcome it. How can we complain when he sends us trouble?” Even in all this suffering Job said nothing against God. Amen.

Just when Job thought things couldn't get any worse they did; to suffer the loss of possessions and even loved ones is one thing, but to suffer pain, day after miserable day is another thing altogether. Job's sores might not have been life threatening but they made his life unbearable; his wife tells him to end it all.

We can surely feel for people whose lives are made so unbearable through suffering that they express the desire to end them. Even the prospect of future suffering is unbearable and unthinkable for some people.

In our culture of freedom of choice and self determination it is not surprising that we're having a debate about assisted dying: why shouldn't people, who are suffering with no hope of relief, choose to end their lives, after all it is 'their' life, so the argument goes. But such a line of thought is unthinkable to Job, because he doesn't see his life as his own, and nor should we. For Job, as we read, life is God given and so only God has the right to take it away, the issues of life and death belong to him alone.

But what about compassion, you might ask, isn't the Lord also compassionate and merciful and abounding in love, and so should we have compassion for people who are suffering; we wouldn't let a dog suffer in the same way. The answer is in the true meaning of compassion, which we'll come to as we progress through the book of Job. But just consider this for now, where would we all be if Jesus had taken the short cut to heaven and not suffered for each and every one of us?

Graham Kendrick: God moves in a mysterious way.

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform:
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never-failing skill,
He treasures up His bright designs,
And works His sovereign will.

Take courage now you fearful saints;
The clouds you so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.

And I will trust the hands
that made the starry heavens
And I will trust the wounds of calvary
And I will trust and I will not be afraid
For all His ways are love

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour:
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.

And I will trust the hands
that made the starry heavens
And I will trust the wounds of calvary
And I will trust and I will not be afraid

And I will trust the hands
that made the starry heavens
And I will trust the wounds of calvary
And I will trust and I will not be afraid
For all His ways are love

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F5-DQmhKPY4>

And now, go in peace to love and serve the Lord, and may the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be with you. Amen