

June 26-30, 2023 Edition

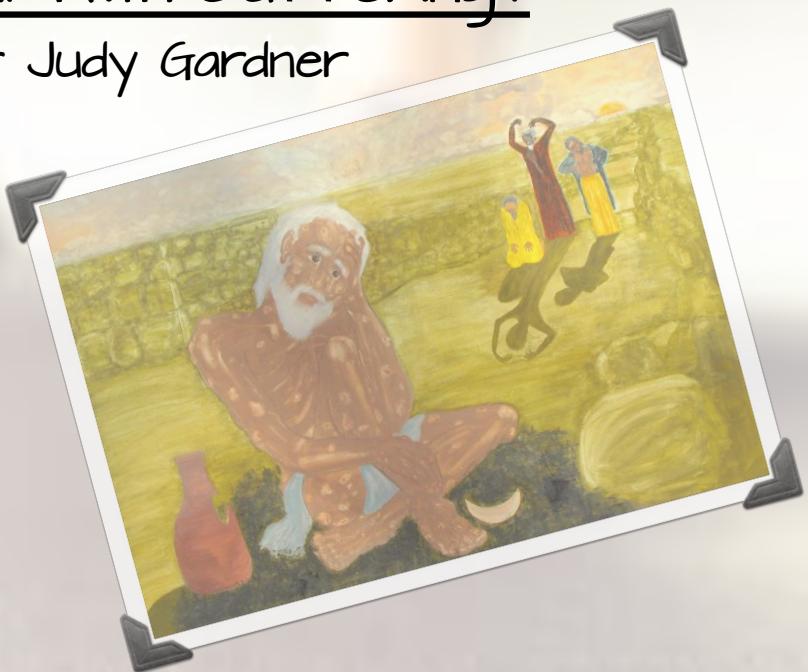
The Year_(s) Of ^{Following} Jesus Part 78

Lessons From Job-

What's The Deal With Suffering?

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well you knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday Reflection: Today we look at the concept of patience. Now there's a couple of kinds of patience- patience with others and even patience with myself is one. Ever been impatient with yourself? Ever condemn yourself? Ever think you weren't enough for God or maybe felt like you were too much for God. That even He couldn't take being around someone like you? There's a song by Citizen Way that has been on K-LOVE quite a bit lately. It's called, When I'm With You and there's a line in that song that gets me every time:

Anytime, anywhere, any heartache
I'm never too much for You to take
There's only love
There's only grace
When I'm with You

Now patience with others and even with ourselves can be tough but that's not really what James is getting at here. Here James is getting at a third kind of patience- patience with God.

Huh? Patience with God? Who gets impatient with God? Well, you do (I don't have to know you very well to know that's true because the Bible says it's true of all of us. You get impatient with God, I get impatient with God. It's what is at the heart of all sin. We see something we think we need and rather than wait and trust God to let Him bring it to us in His timing we run after and catch what we believe will make us happy. Impatience. It can lead to us getting things we never should have had and it can lead to us getting something we would have gotten in God's timing prematurely and messing things up.

Now I'm not saying it's easy to figure out how to "wait on God's timing". It's not. In fact, it's one of the toughest concepts a follower of Jesus will ever have to work through. How do I know what God wants for me? How do I know when something isn't good for me and God is saying to stay away? How do I know when to wait and when to move?

Practice, practice, practice. And not just practice but also fill your mind with the stories in the Bible (they're everywhere in that book) of people who learned how to wait and what it led to in their lives and fill your mind with stories of people who didn't wait (there are a TON of those too) and what kind of misery it often unleashed in their lives and sometimes in the world (ever hear of Adam & Eve?).

It sounds terrifying, I know. But it doesn't have to be. God wants to teach you patience. He wants you to become strong and mature and ready for whatever this world throws at you. He wanted the same thing for the people that James is writing to in his letter. He's writing to people who are going through hell on earth. They are suffering horribly. They are losing their jobs, their livelihood, their homes, their families and sometimes their lives. Why? Because of their faith in Jesus. And James writes to these people and says:

Brothers and sisters, be patient until the Lord comes again. A farmer patiently waits for his valuable crop to grow from the earth and for it to receive the autumn and spring rains. You, too, must be patient. Do not give up hope, because the Lord is coming soon. Brothers and sisters, do not complain against each other or you will be judged guilty. And the Judge is ready to come! Brothers and sisters, follow the example of the prophets who spoke for the Lord. They suffered many hard things, but they were patient. We say

they are happy because they did not give up. You have heard about Job's patience, and you know the Lord's purpose for him in the end. You know the Lord is full of mercy and is kind. James 5:7-11 (NLT)

Wow. How can I be patient while I'm watching what looks to be the end of my world? Is this really part of God's plan? Why are people dying? Why are my brothers and sisters being thrown in prison? Tortured? Losing everything they have? Has God forgotten us? Have we done something wrong? What is going on and how should I handle it? James says, "remember". He tells them to remember how farming works. He says to remember the prophets who lived difficult, unpopular lives and often were killed by the people they were trying to save. And he says to remember Job. What would that name have conjured up in their minds that would help them survive what they were going through. And not just survive but grow in patience while they were remembering? That's what our thoughts will turn to this week. What does James want us to remember about Job and how will that develop a patience in us that will change everything?

But for today, how are we doing at this whole "patience with God" thing? Are we learning how to move when He says "move" and wait when He says "wait"? And what have been the results of our patience with God (or lack thereof) up until now in our lives?

Tuesday Reflection: And so James tells these people who are struggling with persecution. Who are losing everything, sometimes even their lives to remember Job. But what does James want the people to think about when they remember Job? His patience, right? And how his patience paid off in the end. So let's spend some time talking about this guy that, according to James, will give us what we need to get through whatever life may throw our way. Job's story starts off like this:

There once was a man named Job who lived in the land of Uz. He was blameless-a man of complete integrity. He feared God and stayed away from evil... He was, in fact, the richest person in that entire area. Job 1:1-3 (NLT)

The book starts off in a way that would have had the people of Job's day who read this book nodding their heads in agreement. This is the way the world worked (in their estimation). If someone lives a good life then God notices it and blesses him/her for it. So it followed that if someone was rich and successful then people would assume that they had pleased God and were living an impeccable life. But the opposite was true (in their minds anyway) as well. If there were problems in your life then it was a reflection of a life poorly lived. A life of sin and unrighteousness (even if the sin and unrighteousness couldn't be seen by the casual observer) that led to the punishment of God. That was how the people of Job's day saw the world.

Job is going to buck that idea and he didn't even know it yet.

Because Job's life was going to become a sort of case study in the question of human suffering. What causes it? What doesn't cause it? How does God look at suffering? How do people look at and treat those who are suffering? How should someone who is suffering respond to the suffering, other people who are witnessing the suffering and finally, God Himself? It is the most ancient book in the Bible (Genesis tells a far older story than Job's but

Moses didn't write that book until long after Job had been written) and yet it is maybe the book that most accurately and vividly depicts God's attitude towards suffering and the sufferer.

It all begins (as we've already seen) with Job's life going just swimmingly. But very quickly things take a dark turn. Satan presents himself before God and God starts bragging (it's not a sin when God does it ;o) on Job. Satan claims that if Job's life was difficult then he would reject God. He would hate God. He would turn away from God. And do you know what might be the most amazing thing in this book? God doesn't buy it for an instant. It's almost exactly the same accusation Satan makes to Eve about God- Satan tells her that God doesn't have her best in mind and Eve believes Satan. But when Satan makes that claim to God about Job God won't hear it. And so God lets Satan bring suffering into Job's life (I know that seems harsh but the Jews of the first century to whom James writes and asks to remember Job wouldn't have had the same reaction to this story and we'll talk about why that is tomorrow...).

He goes from being one of the richest men in the world to losing everything (financial loss). He goes from having an army of employees to almost nothing. He goes from having children that make him bust with pride to being fatherless- all in a matter of moments. Job doesn't know what hit him. Maybe some of us are living in the land of Uz (a place where wave after wave of misery and suffering just keeps crashing on the shores of our lives) right now. Maybe you have an inkling of how Job felt. I'm pretty sure the Jewish Christians that James is writing to (who James advised to remember Job) can identify with Job.

We don't really have time or space to tell the whole story of Job right here and right now. Basically Job loses everything- his wealth, his family and his health. That's when his friends show up and for basically 35 chapters there is a repeating pattern that I'll sum up like this:

Job's Friends- "Job... what'd you to deserve this?"

Job- "Nothing."

Job's Friends- "Come on, Job... you can tell us. Everyone knows this kind of thing doesn't happen to someone without reason. Everyone knows you must've done something really bad to warrant God doing this to you so tell us... what'd you do?"

Job- "Seriously guys... nothing. I mean... it's not like I'm perfect, you know? But there wasn't some big no-no that I did and now God's thumping me for it. I have no idea why this is happening to me."

Job's Friends- "Come on, Job... you can tell us."

And on it goes for 35 chapters. Job's friends echo the dominant world view of the ancient world. Suffering doesn't just happen. You have to bring it on yourself. Job challenges the dominant world view. Back and forth until finally after 35 chapters Job loses his famous patience and he calls God out. Job uses technical legal language of the ancient world to sort of subpoena God. He shakes his fist toward heaven and demands that God come down and sit in the witness chair so Job can cross examine Him and finally get to the bottom of what's going on once and for all. Things get scary for Job when God actually shows up. And when God shows up, suddenly Job isn't interested in talking face to face with the Creator anymore.

Suddenly Job is changing his tune. "No, no... I'm good... sorry to have bothered You but You can go back to Heaven and take care of truly important matters and I'll stay down here and shut up and stay out of Your way, ok?" But it's not ok with God. God wants to talk. Why? Well, I used to think it was to rub Job's nose in the fact that He should never have dared to question the Creator of the Universe. But I don't think that anymore (and we'll talk about what I do think God is doing on Thursday). Now I think God came down and wouldn't go away because of His love and concern for His child, Job.

God talks with Job for a couple of chapters (again... we'll look at that conversation more closely on Thursday) and when He's done Job feels like He finally KNOWS God. He basically says, "I thought I knew You... but I had no idea! Now I can say I know You." And then God turns to Job's friends (you remember... the guys who thought they were speaking up for God by accusing Job?) and says something staggering:

I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not said what is right about me, as my servant Job did. Job 42:7 (NLT)

Say what? But these guys were speaking up for God. These guys were claiming that God doesn't randomly thump people with misery and suffering for no reason. And they were right... He doesn't. Satan does. It was Satan that did it. It was Satan's plan. Did God "let" it happen? Yes (and we'll look more at that tomorrow). But they were right in saying God doesn't do that. They were wrong however in saying that God did "thump" people for doing wrong. The message seems to be, God doesn't thump anyone. Discipline? Sure. God disciplines His children but if you think what Job went through was discipline then I'm SO thankful you weren't my parent.

And the story ends on an upbeat. Job recovers his health, his wealth and he has more children in his later years than he had before his time of suffering. It always seemed like a strange "afterward" to the story. What? Now everything's just ok because Job has more kids and more money than he did before? That makes it ok for God to play with Job's life? It didn't seem right to me and now I realize, it wouldn't have been right if that's the way it really was. But Job knew that's not how it was. And so did the first century Jews James is writing to. We'll spend the next three days unpacking exactly what from that story James thinks will get his suffering readers through the toughest days of their lives if they'd just remember it. But maybe for today you could spend some time thinking about how you handle suffering and misery when it comes your way? Do you blame yourself? Someone else? Do you blame God? All perfectly normal but none of them will lead to the patience to endure whatever this world can throw your way.

Wednesday Reflection: So the first thing that the people that James was writing to would have thought about when he said, "remember Job" was that God. Is. In. Control. That's the first lesson of the book of Job. God is in control even when it doesn't look like it. That's why the story of Job unfolds on two different stages- the earthly stage where Job and his friends live and the Heavenly stage where God lives.

One day while God is sitting in His throne room Satan comes in (I didn't know that was allowed but more on that in a minute) and God points out His child, Job. "Have you seen this

guy? He's such a good guy! I really like him!" Satan replies, "well yeah... of course You like him. He does everything you want him to do because You make his life so easy. If you brought suffering into his life he wouldn't be such a model. In fact, he'd curse You to Your face.

God doesn't buy it:

"All right, you may test him," the Lord said to Satan. "Do whatever you want with everything he possesses, but don't harm him physically." So Satan left the Lord's presence. Job 1:12 (NLT)

I don't know about you but this always bothered me. God's playing a game with Job's life? It's like God is the sadistic dungeon master in a messed up game of Dungeons and Dragons. But the thing is, that's not how the ancient Jews saw it. They understood suffering very well. And they were never surprised by it. Why not? Because they had text books like Job to teach them about the question of suffering. And as well as a Jewish man or woman would know the book of Job there was another story they would have known even better. The story of Adam & Eve in the Garden of Eden and their fall from grace. If you know the story then you know that God put Adam & Eve in the garden. He also put two trees in that garden. One was the tree of life, the other a tree of curses (it was called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil but in the end what it was was a tree of curses). He told them they could eat as much from the Tree of Life as they pleased but they weren't to eat from the other tree. On the day they ate from the tree of curses God told them they would die.

Ever wonder why God put both trees right there in the middle of the garden? Why not put it at the top of Mt. Everest where they were unlikely to ever go? And it turns out He did it that way because of love. How so? Well, if Adam & Eve didn't have a choice to disobey then all God had was robots. They couldn't do anything wrong but they couldn't decide on their own to do something right either. Without the ability to choose to reject God's way they couldn't choose to embrace God and love Him and each other. And for God, love is the most valuable commodity in the universe. Nothing else comes close. And His wild gamble was that somehow the love that humans chose to unleash in this world would somehow eclipse the pain and hate that giving us the ability to make our own choices was bound to create. God is so sold on love that He made that bargain.

When you stop and think about it- Job is simply a retelling of the story of the Garden of Eden. The conversation between Satan & God must have also taken place before the Garden of Eden was planted by God. Of course they will love you... they have no choice. Give them a choice and allow them to feel pain and they'll reject you in a heart beat. And even though God knew what would happen He risked it. Why? Because of love. I know you have felt pain and heartache in your life. It's one of the things that we all have in common. You may have wondered if God's gamble that love would eclipse all the pain and hate and misery that choice would bring into this world was a good one. But if He hadn't made that gamble then you could take away every good thing that's ever happened in your life. No love of parents, friends, boyfriends or girlfriends. No love of a husband for a wife or a wife for her husband. No love that a parent experiences for his/her child. All gone. I think God made the right decision (I'm sure He's so relieved to hear that I agree with His choice ;o)

So where does the suffering come from? It comes from our sin. When Adam & Eve decided they knew better than God how to live their lives and ate the forbidden fruit they caused a serious breakdown in several very important relationships. Their sin short-circuited the connection between Heaven and earth. Their relationship with God was strained and broken in a way that only Jesus could truly fix (a story for another time). But their connection with each other was also short circuited. The first thing Adam does when God shows up is blame Eve for the debacle. Adam & Eve and their descendant's relationship with themselves psychologically was short circuited as mental illness and self destructive behaviors entered the world for the first time. And finally, human kind's relationship with nature was short circuited. For the first time people could be hurt accidentally, by animal attack, natural disaster or by sickness and disease. The ancient Israelites knew that suffering was not God's fault and the existence of suffering was no sign that He was not in control. It was a necessary evil in order to allow humans to choose love over hate. So when James tells his readers who are suffering for their faith, losing their homes, their wealth, their families and even their lives to remember Job the first thing that would have reminded them of was that God was still in control even if it didn't look like it right now. It was part of their national consciousness. This verse from the Jewish hymnal would have been well known to them:

The good man does not escape all troubles- he has them too. But the Lord helps him in each and every one. Psalm 34:19 (TLB)

And even Jesus made sure to remind His friends that suffering and pain were not optional:

I told you these things so that you can have peace in me. In this world you will have trouble, but be brave! I have defeated the world. John 16:33 (NCV)

Do you have pain and suffering in your life? Jesus would say, "don't be surprised." James would say, remember Job. Remember that God is in control. But that's not all we should remember. Tomorrow more about the lesson of Job.

Thursday Reflection: The second thing Job reminds us is that God cares about us. It may be hard to believe when we are in the midst of intense suffering but the message of Job is very clear- God cares. But at first it doesn't really seem like it, does it? When Job loses his patience and calls God out this is how God begins the conversation:

From out of a storm, the Lord said to Job: Why do you talk so much when you know so little? Now get ready to face me! Can you answer the questions I ask? How did I lay the foundation for the earth? Job 38:1-4 (CEV)

It doesn't exactly sound like a gentle, caring start to a meaningful conversation, does it? It will evolve into exactly that but first God has to establish who is who in this relationship. It sounds accusatory at first though, doesn't it. And that's what I used to think this part of the book of Job was- God coming down and spraying Job in the face with water and saying, "bad Job!" But that's not what Job hears at all. Do you know how I know? Because of Job's reaction to God's words:

Then Job replied to the Lord... "You asked, 'Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorance?' It is I- and I was talking about things I knew nothing about, things far too wonderful for me... I had only heard about you before, but now I have seen you with my

own eyes. I take back everything I said, and I sit in dust and ashes to show my repentance." Job 42:1-6 (NLT)

Job isn't frightened or offended by God's "explanation" (really it's not an explanation. If you read everything that God said then you know He never offers an explanation). Job is renewed. He says he has a new understanding of God. Before Job's experience of God was impersonal and filled with misunderstandings. But now Job sees a whole new side to God. Why? Because of the second part of God's response to Job. God starts out establishing His credentials and if I had to paraphrase what God says to Job in the first act of His response I'd say that God was telling Job, "Job... I'd love to explain all of this to you but I can't. Because in order for you to understand it you'd have to be able to understand how I created the universe. But these things are beyond you and so is my explanation of why suffering exists in this world." That's pretty much what God tells Job in part one of His response.

Then God moves on to the next phase of His response. This phase always seemed very strange to me. God says things like:

Who waters the desert and takes care of the wild donkey?
Who created the behemoth? The greatest of My creatures?
Who created leviathan?

What does that matter? Who cares who waters the desert and takes care of wild animals. Who cares who made the leviathan and the behemoth? God does. And do you know what those ancient readers would have understood immediately what I missed for so many years? They would have immediately realized that nobody would water the desert. Who would do something so ridiculous? Don't waste water on the desert. Nobody lives there. No point to it. It's an extravagant waste.

And who cares about wild animals? They don't anyone any good. Why take care of them? It's a waste of precious resources. And don't get us started on the leviathan and behemoth. Those were chaos monsters- they terrified the ancient people of the middle east. As far as any humans were concerned the only good leviathan and behemoth were a dead leviathan and behemoth. But God says He loves them. He considers them to be one of His finest works. God says He cares about the wild animals and that He loves seeing the desert bloom after a rain storm. Basically God is telling Job that He loves pizzazz. Not because there's any tangible worth in pizzazz. God loves pizzazz simply for pizzazz' sake.

And Job starts to get a bigger picture of God. A picture that would change Job for the rest of his life. He saw God in a light he had never seen God in before. Suddenly God was different and it impacted Job profoundly. It gave him the ability to move forward from what has to be one of the worst couple of weeks any human has ever had and with this God of pizzazz create a brand new, beautiful life put together from the wreckage and broken pieces of Job's old life.

What's your view of God look like? Is He a big, scary authority figure that you're afraid of? Have you ever thought about God loving pizzazz for pizzazz' sake? Are you like Him? Do you love pizzazz (and all of our definitions of pizzazz will be different but you know what I mean...)? Spend some time today thinking about all the ways you can see that God has put

some pizzazz in this world for seemingly no reason at all. And then maybe add some pizzazz to your life today for no reason other than you and God both love pizzazz (and I'll bet you've never seen the word "pizzazz" so many times in such a short space... you're welcome ;o)

Friday Reflection: The final thing James' readers would have brought to mind when James told them to remember Job would have been that to the extent that I perceive Job's lessons... I will have patience. I wasn't sure what word to use here. It's not about knowledge or understanding. It's about perceiving or experiencing or incorporating the lessons that God is in control (even if it doesn't look like it) and He truly cares about what I'm going through. And not just that... He will make something absolutely beautiful out of the mess that my life has become:

You have heard about Job's patience, and you know the Lord's purpose for him in the end. You know the Lord is full of mercy and is kind. James 5:10-11 (NLT)

It's God's specialty. Taking the evil that Satan does to God's children in this world and bringing about the exact opposite of what Satan intended. He doesn't seem to be able to stop all the bad stuff from happening to us (I mean He could but He won't and if you're wondering why refer to Wednesday's devotional reflection which deals with the question of why suffering exists in the world) but He is a Master at turning the tables on evil. With Job Satan wanted to drive him to reject God and expel Him from his life forever. He wanted Job to be miserable for the rest of his life and never again experience the joy and satisfaction that life with God can bring. And while Job was suffering for a season, that wasn't the end of the story. In the end Job refused to be defined by the suffering he endured and chose instead to be defined by Who God is and by extension who Job himself is. A God he now knew in a way he never knew him before. It's like a lump of coal only becomes a diamond through intense pressure. Keep the coal safe and free from intense pressure and it will forever remain a lump of coal good only for heating people's homes and filling up the stockings of naughty boys and girls at Christmas time. But the intense pressure a lump of coal goes through doesn't destroy it. It makes it better.

Same thing with us. And I know what you're thinking... what about when the pressure does destroy us? I used to wonder the same thing. I can remember thinking, "sure... Job had the pieces of his broken life picked up and put back together but what about his kids that died? What about them? Didn't the pressure destroy them?" Not if you believe God. Not if you believe the Bible. There's a verse in Romans that always troubled me:

As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be disappointed."
Romans 10:11 (NCV)

I hate to say it out loud but I wondered if that was really true. Weren't Job's kids "disappointed" at what the end of their story was? And what about men and women through the ages who have died due to the pressure of suffering and misery? How was that for them not a disappointment? I don't think so any more. In fact, I'd say that Job's kids and any other child of God who does not "survive" (physically speaking) the pressure of intense suffering and pain (which one day will be all of us on some level or another as we all die at some point) understand the truth of Romans 10:11 better than anyone who hasn't had the benefit

of dying. I know that sounds strange but hear me out. When Job's kids closed their eyes for the last time on this side of eternity and opened them up again for the first time on the other side and saw what was waiting for them... I don't think they were disappointed at all. In fact, I imagine they were grateful to the bandits that sped up their arrival in Heaven.

And Job... I'm sure he missed his kids every single day, but his experience with God changed him completely. I know because of how the story ends. It ends with this very strange epilogue or afterward about Job having more kids and more money than before and then the writer seemingly just tosses this last part in:

So the LORD blessed Job in the second half of his life even more than in the beginning...
He named his first daughter Jemimah, the second Keziah, and the third Keren-happuch...
And their father put them into his will along with their brothers. Job 42:12-15 (NLT)

So what? What's the big deal? Turns out it's a HUGE deal and everyone reading it in the ancient world would have been left shocked by this ending. Why? Because the writer of the book of Job lists the names of Job's new daughters and not his sons. That was unheard of in the ancient world. Daughters may be loved by their fathers but they were not useful. They were a drain on resources. And once they were old enough to marry they joined another family and helped that family create a legacy and had no more impact on their family of origin.

But not only does the writer of Job name the girls and not the boys- the names were unheard of in the ancient world. They were frivolous names that didn't mean anything of any importance. Jemimah was a word that meant "little dove". He named her after a bird. Why? Probably just because it made him happy. It was a little bit of pizzazz, right. Another daughter was named Keziah which means, cinnamon. And if you've ever been to the airport and stood there waiting for someone to come in and smelled the cinabons being sold just a few feet away then you know why Job named one of his daughters after it. And then Keren was the name of makeup. It's like Job named his daughters dove, cinnamon and maybelline. Everyone would have thought he was crazy. But that's not the worst of it.

Then he added them to his will. Nobody added their daughters into their will in the ancient world. There was no point to it. It just drained your family of resources and weakened your legacy. But Job does. Why? Because now Job is being gratuitously good and uncontrollably generous and irrationally loving and he's throwing around pizzazz for no reason other than just for pizzazz' sake.

Does that remind you of anybody else from this story?

Job is the story of the triumph, of the redemption, of the self-sacrificial love of God, the Creator who loves pizzazz... And a man who has been refined through suffering and through the care of his creator and now he loves pizzazz as well. It's showing us that in his suffering Job became more like God. He started to care about things that nobody else cared about. In this case his daughters. He became extravagantly good and generous and loving. And in so doing Job proved that God's gamble was a good one. And Job has become a source of encouragement and strength to billions of people who live on different continents, cultures,

civilizations, languages... all because Job allowed himself to be refined in the midst of his pain. He allowed God to make a diamond out of the broken dust his life had become.

It is the promise that Satan was dead wrong about old Job. The central question in the Book is, can a human being hold on to God and faith, and life, and love when it does not seem to pay off at all- when it just doesn't make any sense at all? And what happens when a human being does? Job's faithfulness and suffering was being used by God to vindicate God's whole wild adventure in covenant love. Job's honesty and perseverance have been used now for thousands of years to bless those of us going through unimaginable pain and suffering.

Are you going through what Job went through? Are you living in the land of Uz? A place of unimaginable suffering and pain and misery? If you are James wants you to remember Job. In the book of Job the writer says, "hang on Job, keep going, don't let go, don't give up." The writer wants us to say that not just to Job but to say it to ourselves, to say it to each other, to say it to the people that are all around us who suffer, who anguish, who agonize, who hurt, who question, who don't know, who don't understand, to say to them, "Don't you give up. Don't you let go. You hang on, you keep going, you persevere, because it matters." Your little life, your little suffering matters more than you can imagine. You are part of something cosmic and eternal that you cannot even dream about.

We all will spend time in the Land of Uz. Everybody will suffer. Some in this room are suffering right now. Deep, deep hurt. Why? I don't know why. How long will it last? I don't know how long. Does your response matter? More than you can possibly imagine, more than you can even dream, so don't you let go. Remember that God is in control (even if it doesn't look like it), He cares deeply about what you're going through (even if it doesn't feel like it) and to the extent that you and I can incorporate that experience into our lives we will have a patience we can't begin to understand right now.

So. Don't. Let. Go.