

A Monument of Praise in the Valley of Despair

When Lightning Strikes – Part V

Job 2:1-10

Introduction

The citizens and farmers of Enterprise, Alabama, had a deep problem. Their entire economy rested on successfully growing cotton, as all the farmers did in and around Enterprise.

This was before a small beetle finally somehow made it all the way from Mexico, in 1892, to Alabama by 1915. A few years later, all the cotton fields were literally eaten bare by this little bug that was officially called the *Anthonomus grandis*; otherwise known as the boll weevil. The farmers were facing bankruptcy and the rest of the town with them.

One farmer saw it as an opportunity. Rather than pack his bags and surrender to the pest that had arrived in swarms and loved to eat cotton, he decided to plant another crop. He had heard of another Alabama man who had convinced a number of people that peanuts could be a cash crop.

Many did not believe this man. What would a former slave working in a school for former children of slaves in Alabama know about peanuts – even if he was named after a former President? His name was George Washington Carver.

The farmer in Enterprise, Alabama, had nothing to lose and everything to gain, so he planted peanuts. He was the only farmer who did.

We can imagine the stares and whispers he endured. At the end of that year, his crop was so prosperous that he paid off all his debts and put money in his pocket. The next year, all the other farmers followed suit. They never looked back.

Today, nearly four billion dollars a year are made from peanuts. We eat seven hundred million pounds of peanut butter every single year.

Mr. Fleming, a local businessman in Enterprise, came up with the idea to build a monument dedicated to thanking the very bug that made them prosperous. Now, for nearly one hundred years, a monument sits at the intersection of College and Main streets.

This monument stands more than thirty feet in the air. At the top is a woman whose looks would remind us of the Statue of Liberty. She was crafted in Italy and shipped to Alabama in her flowing gown. With her arms raised, she holds in her hands a platter, on top of which is a large imitation of the most famous beetle in the world – and it is not John Lennon (not that I would know anything about the Beatles).

This monument was dedicated by the town on December 11, 1919, to the boll weevil.ⁱ

The bronze plaque has this message for everyone to read: “In profound appreciation of the Boll Weevil and what it has done as the Herald of Prosperity, this monument is erected by the Citizens of Enterprise, Coffee County, Alabama.”ⁱⁱ

Imagine people raising a monument to an agricultural pest; a monument raised to the heavens as an act of gratitude for a crisis; a challenge; a new perspective; a new opportunity that came on the heels of unexpected suffering and loss.

We have been introduced recently to one of the most successful men of old. It was not in Alabama, but in the land of Uz that this businessman,

herdsman, farmer, and entrepreneur continually recorded one success after another.

When the locals would gather in the town square, they would talk about another bumper crop for Job and his family. He never recorded a loss; he was wealthy, respected, loved, and satisfied.

Unknown to Job, however, a pest was moving into his territory. It was not a beetle, but Beelzebub – the Lord of the Flies. And he brought with him pestilence like no man had ever seen or endured.

In a matter of thirty-nine seconds, Job received news that he was bankrupt. He was also bereaved of his ten children.

Job did not know that God had allowed the devil to take everything he had in order to reveal His glory and sovereignty in the most mysterious way imaginable.

Satan had predicted that Job would curse God if he lost his business and his children. He was wrong.

In Job chapter 1, we read with amazement, as Job says in verses 21-22,

. . . “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.

Frankly, Job’s response is almost unbelievable – in fact, if it were not in the Bible, I would not believe it. How does someone pass this crisis of suffering and remain surrendered to the hand of God?

“It was late afternoon,” one author wrote, “when the boat’s engine sputtered, stalled, and refused to restart. Gallons of water surged into the craft as it pitched on six-foot swells. The five Jaeger men had done all they knew how to do, but it wasn’t enough. An exciting family fishing trip was now becoming a thing of horror. They were going under. George Jaeger, his three sons, and his elderly father tightened the buckles on their life jackets, tied themselves together with a rope, and slipped silently into the dark and boiling Atlantic.”

“George glanced at his watch as the boat finally sank out of sight – it was 6:30 p.m. It grew dark. One of his sons swallowed too much salt water, gagged, and then choked to death. Their helpless father heard his sons, one by one, and then his own dad, choke on the water, succumb to the waves, and drown.”

“George never stopped swimming – in fact, he swam for eight hours, until he finally staggered onto the shore, still pulling the rope that bound him to the bodies of his sons and his father.”

Can you imagine this scene?

Later, George told reporters, “My youngest boy, Clifford, was the first to go. I had always taught our children that death meant you would go to be with Jesus Christ. Before Cliff died, I heard him say, ‘I can’t go on fighting . . . I want to be with Jesus.’”ⁱⁱⁱ

Even in the midst of this turbulent scene, their crisis became a monument of faith, raised to their faithful God.

. . . “Blessed be the name of the Lord.”

I had lunch a few days ago, with a pastor friend who invited me to lunch, along with his son. He told me some of the details of the death of his wife only a few weeks ago. It was sudden and unexpected. This dear brother was given some time away from his pulpit and came to our church on the Sunday we began to study the book of Job. I was so honored that he told me some of his story. I can say that, with tears in his eyes, and in his son’s, they spoke of the faithfulness of God.

These gentlemen joined the tribe of Job – they took their crisis, fashioned it into a monument of praise, and lifted it up to their God, whom they faithfully follow. These are they who build monuments of praise in the valley of despair.

Now if we take a step or two away from suffering, we would all agree that pain is quite a teacher. From painful circumstances we learn so many lessons. One author categorized them as teaching us lessons of:

- humility;
- eternal hope;
- what we truly love;
- God’s truest blessings;
- sharing empathy for others;
- enduring strength.^{iv}

There is no doubt that God uses suffering to correct us.

David wrote in Psalm 119:

- Verse 67 – *Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word.*
- Verse 71 – *It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes.*

- Verse 75 – *I know, O Lord, that Your judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me.*

God uses suffering to correct us, but further, to conform us; to craft us into His character.

Paul wrote,

And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character . . . (Romans 5:3-4a)

Christianity gave us peace with God. It did not give us patience with God, or life in general. That, Paul says, is created in the crucible of life. It is fashioned after the lightning strikes.

If the book of Job ended with chapter one, we would marvel at the purity and perseverance of Job. It would be wonderful and entirely instructive if we closed the book of Job at this point, with the sound of Job’s praise providing the benediction. He has built quite a monument of praise in the valley of despair.

The trouble is that the Lord of the Flies has more devastation in mind, and the Lord of the Universe is going to allow it.

Scene Two Before the Throne of God

Circle the word that we are shocked to read, and maybe even a little troubled – it is the first word in Job chapter 2,

Again . . .

Again!

Surely not again!

Yes, again.

This is scene two before the throne of God.

Look at Job 2:1-3a.

Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the Lord.

The Lord said to Satan, “Where have you come from?” Then Satan answered the Lord and said, “From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it.”

The Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job? . . .”

Remember from chapter 1, this is a rhetorical question because God knows Satan has been considering no one on earth like he has been

considering Job. Asking him, “Have you considered My servant Job?” is like, as one author wrote, “asking Freshmen guys, ‘Have you considered girls?’”^v

“Of course! Why else do you think we went to college?!”

God goes on to say in verse 3,

“. . . For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause.”

In the Hebrew text, the waw consecutive does not mean “although you incited Me,” but could be better rendered, “and yet you incite Me against him without cause.”^{vi}

In other words, the Lord is announcing that no matter what He allows Satan to pull on Job, He is still in control and Job’s character will remain intact.

Satan scoffs in Job 2:4,

. . . “Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life.”

“Skin for skin!” is nothing more than a cruel, unfounded criticism of Job. Satan implies that Job is more than willing to sacrifice the skin of his children and his cattle and his employees, as long as he keeps his own skin.

Satan says, “Every man has a price . . . I just haven’t yet found his . . . but I think I know what it is!”^{vii}

Satan offers it in Job 2:5,

“. . . put forth Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse You to Your face.”

Touch his bones and his flesh. Since the bones were considered the seat of illness in ancient days, Satan has in mind a disease that will threaten Job’s life, and then he also has several diseases that will affect Job’s physical body.^{viii}

Satan believed that Job would do anything to keep his health.

Most people would. Threaten to take a person’s life and they will do anything to live another day.

This is like Queen Elizabeth I, who said on her deathbed in 1603, “All my possessions for a moment of time.”^{ix}

Satan said, “Bring Job to the point of death and he will trade away his precious faith.”

Once again, God delegates authority and latitude to Satan, while at the same time, directing the limits of Satan’s activities. Look at Job 2:6.

So the Lord said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life.”

The Horror of Scene Two on Earth

The horror of scene two on earth now unfolds.

Look at Job 2:7.

Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.

We have no idea how much time had elapsed between the funerals of his ten children and the first sight of red bumps on his back, but we have every reason to believe that Satan would have wanted very little time to elapse. He loves to hit when someone is already down. He has no mercy or compassion; he knows nothing of leniency or pity. He is the condemned defeated angel and his greatest desire is to stifle the worship of his conqueror.

Skin ulcers began to pop out all over Job’s body. Not an inch of his body was spared – from the top of his head to even the soles of his feet. This meant Job could not stand without pain and he could not sit down or even lie down without aggravating the boils that covered his body.

The Hebrew words translated “sore boils” are the same words used for one of the ten plagues in Egypt.

However, this was only the beginning. Let me chronicle, from several verses in this book, the physical sufferings of Job. They include:

- ulcerous sores (2:7);
- persistent itching (2:8);
- inability to eat (3:24);
- an overwhelming sense of dread and fear at times (3:25);
- insomnia (7:4) (Job said, “When I lie down I say, ‘When shall I arise?’ But the night continues, and I am continually tossing until dawn.”);
- worms (7:5) (no doubt in his sores);
- hardened skin that cracked and oozed with pus (7:5);

- difficulty breathing (9:18);
- deep dark circles around his eyes (16:16);
- loss of weight (19:20; 33:21) (which we would only imagine);
- constant, continual pain (30:17) (Job said, in 30:16b-17, “. . . Days of affliction have seized me. At night it pierces my bones within me, and my gnawing pains take no rest.).

It is no wonder that when Job’s friends came to him, they did not even recognize him.

Job’s pain was private – it was excruciating and relentless.

In Job 30:28, he says,

“I go about mourning without comfort . . .”

In verse 30, Job adds,

“. . . my bones burn with fever.”

Satan turned the corkscrew of suffering – hoping that a word of blasphemy would come from Job’s mouth.

Job’s suffering was private, but it was also public.

Later on, in the Law of Moses, we read of the warning of God to disobedient Israelites,

The Lord will smite you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors and with the scab and with the itch, from which you cannot be healed. (Deuteronomy 28:27)

Even before the Law was given, these things would have been perceived as tokens of God’s judgment and displeasure.

We also have reason to believe that the people living in Job’s time had instruction to separate those who were so judged from the rest of the people.

Sickness, in the days of the Patriarchs, usually meant sin. That is unlike this dispensation in which sickness can be for all the reasons we have already discussed – for correction, but for construction; to develop faith and perseverance.

However, in the days of the Patriarchs, those infected with unexplainable diseases, especially those which affected the skin, were to be put outside the camp or the city (Leviticus 13).

How do we know that Job was viewed as a sinner, judged by God? Obviously, his counselors are going to make that clear.

Before they even speak, however, notice where Job is, in Job 2:8,

And he took a potsherd to scrape himself while he was sitting among the ashes.

Job was not lying at home in his own comfortable bed between crisp white sheets and being waited on by private medical staff.

No, he was where all the other lepers would be found – quarantined at the town dump.^x

Towns in the Middle East had a landfill – a city dump outside the gates where garbage and sewage were dumped. Periodically, the rotting garbage would be burned as a way of sanitation.^{xi}

To be sitting among the ashes was to be sitting near garbage and the dung heap. This was the place where beggars foraged for scraps of food . . . where dogs fought for something to eat . . . this was the city’s sewer disposal site and there Job sat in the ashes of a recent fire.^{xii}

Job’s face, hands, feet, and every other part of him that could be seen through his torn clothing were oozing with open sores. His eyes were swollen from crying and the dark circles around his eyes made him look demented. His clothes were caked with mud and blood; the bones in his shoulder blades poked through his dirty cloak. His breath was short and strained; his face gaunt with the lack of food. There Job sits, who was earlier introduced to us as “the greatest of all the men of the east” (Job 1:3). There sits the great man, hunched over and rocking back and forth with despair and weeping; at times, oblivious to the dogs and the beggars and the lepers. He was only making his misery worse with his incessant scratching with the blunt edge of a broken piece of pottery – trying to bring some moment of relief from his agony.

Job’s mind was still grieving ten fresh graves and the loss of everything he owned. He recalls every child and every memory; he remembers the blessing of God.

“The blessing of God?! That’s it! This is all His fault!”

Surely Job will say now, “God, You are no longer my God.”

Then, Job has a visitor. Someone is speaking to him, in Job 2:9-10, as he feverishly scratches at his open sores.

Then his wife said to him, “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!”

But he said to her, “You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

I cannot believe Job said this. Let me read it again.

. . . “Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

There in the ash heap, Job raised a monument of praise in the valley of despair.

God’s people are soldiers on the battlefield; but there are times when they are the battlefield.^{xiii}

Wait! Do you mean Job was correct in believing that this adversity had come from God?

You read it too. It was.

Moses was told something interesting as he argued with God’s call in his life. He said, “Lord, I’m not qualified to serve You before Pharaoh – You’ve got the wrong man.”

The Lord said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?” (Exodus 4:11)

The immediate cause of your suffering might be that disease, or that handicap, or that deformity; it might be raging cancer cells or blindness or any number of things. However, behind both sunshine and shadow is the sovereign plan of God.

The disciples learned this lesson one day when they walked past a blind man and then asked the Lord,

. . . “who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?” (John 9:2)

Someone sinned, right?

Jesus answered, “It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him. (John 9:3)

In other words, this man was born blind so that God might be glorified in the restoration of his sight.

Wait a minute! Do you mean God caused this child to be born blind?

Yes. God knit him together in the womb, just as He did you and me, and for this one, He chose to leave him sightless.

This means the sorrow the parents felt, God ordained.

Do you mean the suffering of the child was in the hands of God?

All Jerusalem knew this man had been born blind. The religious leaders knew it and perhaps thousands of others who walked around the temple knew this beggar. Month after month, year after year, he begged to make a living off the pity of people who assumed he had done something wrong.

Jesus said, in effect, this sickness was ordained to glorify God – the greater the number of people who knew him, the greater the number of witnesses to God’s power; the greater his suffering, the greater his joy and testimony on God’s behalf.

Jesus healed the man and gave him his sight.

The blind man becomes a picture of the suffering saint – he becomes a testimony of something that will one day happen to everyone of us who believe, for on the day of our glorification, all diseases and all suffering and all affliction will be set aside forever and we will testify to the greatness of God in our glorified bodies.

The apostle Peter added this encouragement when he wrote,

. . . to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, you will rejoice with exultation at the revelation of His glory. (I Peter 4:13 paraphrased)

Conclusion – Two Questions

Let me ask two questions.

1. Question #1: Are you willing to wait?

Are you willing to wait – and not just wait, but prepare for fresh challenges to your faith? Are you willing to prepare for those moments when the word, “Again,” is written in your own life; when you are down and still get hit?

“Again” – are you willing to wait on God for direction; for a solution; for a remedy?

However, not just wait, as it is possible to grow bitter and ungrateful and silent while waiting.

2. Question #2: Are you willing to worship?

Are you willing to roll up the sleeves of your faith and praise Him? Trusting that:

- with prolonged sickness, He is ultimately in charge;

- at the graveside of your loved ones, He is in control;
- when the x-ray returns and could not be worse, He is in command;
- when the job is lost and the funds start to run out, He is in charge;
- when the relationship ends and you have done everything you can, He is in charge;
- when the pregnancy test is negative, He is in charge;
- when the pregnancy test is positive, He is in charge;
- when the promotion does not come, He is in command;
- when you are struggling with pain and there is no medical solution, He is in control.

You do not understand it; you cannot explain it; you do not deserve it; you did not expect it, but you cannot escape it. You lift your voice and praise Him.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is worship at the purest, most lofty level.

One author said, this is when you pray, “O, God, I trust You. I don’t know why I’m going through this. If there’s something I can learn, wonderful. If there’s something someone else can learn, great. Just get me through it . . . hold me close . . . deepen me . . . change me.”^{xiv}

This is what it means to turn your crisis into a testimony of praise – to raise a monument of praise in the valley of despair.

One of the men on our church elder team handed me this bit of prose, written by Lehman Strauss, a converted Jewish man who was a widely used Bible teacher and scholar:

God does whatever He wants to do,
Whenever He wants to do it,
For whatever purpose He chooses,
He involves whomever He will,
And whatever He does, is right!^{xv}

Peter went on to write, in his first letter, centuries earlier,

After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. To Him be dominion [ultimate control] forever and ever. Amen. (I Peter 5:10-11)

This is another way of saying, “Because of our sovereign Lord and the future of His revealed glory and our glorification, here and now, we can raise a monument of praise in the valley of despair.”

Sing:

I love You Lord

And I lift my voice

To worship You,

O my soul rejoice,

Take joy my King

In what You hear,

May it be a sweet, sweet sound

In Your ear.

Father, today I want to pray especially for those who find themselves in a dark place; in a valley of despair with no sunlight, with only shadows. They are in the crucible and can only feel the heat from the fiery trails. There is no sign of rescue or relief in sight. Would You change this valley of shadows into their hiding place in which You are near, in which You are real. Calm their fears. Quiet their spirits. Develop their faith. Remind them of Your grace. Remind them of Your coming glory.

Sing:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;

Praise Him all creatures here below;

Praise Him above ye heavenly host;

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 2/4/2007 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ “Boll Weevil Monument,” 2/2007, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boll_Weevil_Monument.

ⁱⁱ http://www.roadsideamerica.com/tips/getAttraction.php3?tip_AttractionNO==19.

ⁱⁱⁱ Charles R. Swindoll, *Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life* (Multnomah, 1983), p. 265.

^{iv} John MacArthur, *The Power of Suffering* (Victor Books, 1995), p. 26.

^v Steven Lawson, *When All Hell Breaks Loose* (NavPress, 1993), p. 48.

^{vi} John E. Hartley, *NICOT: Job* (Eerdmans, 1988), p. 79.

^{vii} Warren W. Wiersbe, *Job: Be Patient* (Victor Books, 1991), p. 18.

^{viii} Hartley, p. 81.

^{ix} Ray Robinson, *Famous Last Words* (Workman Publishing, 2003), p. 101.

^x Mike Mason, *The Gospel According to Job* (Crossway, 1994), p. 44.

^{xi} David McKenna, *Job* (Word, 1986), p. 47.

^{xii} Wiersbe, p. 19.

^{xiii} Lawson, p. 50.

^{xiv} Charles R. Swindoll, *Job: A Man of Heroic Endurance* (Word, 2004), p. 40.

^{xv} Lehman Strauss