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## **What Job Didn't Know . . . And We Do \***

by  
WRF Member Dr. George C. Fuller

Job knew loss and pain, suffering and depression. He had been a good man, a man of integrity who loved others and served God. And he had been blessed and prospered. God had "hedged him about" with a devoted family and great business success. He had everything, and he was grateful for God's hand of mercy and grace.

But then it happened. In a brief time he lost his servants, business, and all ten of his children.

How did Job handle the news?

"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (1:21, ESV).

Even when Satan afflicted him with "loathsome sores," Job challenged his wife, "Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" The biblical record states twice: "In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong" and "In all this Job did not sin with his lips." In the face of such severe tragedy, how great the patience of Job.

But how intense the suffering, how deep the cries of anguish, how great the impatience to have it ended, to see the closing walls of pain complete their crushing task. Read Job 3; hear him wish he had never been born (verses 3-10), or that he might have died at birth (11-19), or, given the impossibility of those two wishes, that he might die immediately (20-26).

Enter the sacred ground of someone else's suffering and feel Job's pain. Experience his sense of helplessness.

*Trapped:* "God has walled up my way, so that I cannot pass, and he has set darkness upon my paths" (19:8).

*Lonely:* "All my intimate friends abhor me, and those whom I loved have turned against me" (19:19).

*Weak:* "My bones stick to my skin and to my flesh, and I have escaped by the skin of my teeth" (19:20).

*Desperate for a friend:* "He who withholds kindness from a friend forsakes the fear of the Almighty.... Have I said, 'Make me a gift?'" (6:14-22).

His three friends did try to help. “Miserable comforters,” he called them (16:2), and indeed they were. The “correct” theology of the day said that suffering resulted from sin. Therefore, went the logic, Job must have committed a great sin. His friends let him have it: “Just confess, Job.” They threw their theology into a life so riddled and racked with pain. They knew their doctrine. While they *knew*, however, they did not *feel*.

Today in 2019, your suffering may be great, severe: physical pain, emotional anguish, affliction, torment – if not today, perhaps tomorrow. But you have an advantage over Job, primarily because Jesus has come, endured the cross, and been raised. In the shadows Job could only look forward to the time of God’s deliverance. I want you to know the disadvantages under which *he* suffered and, by contrast, the privileges that are *yours*.

*First of all, Job did not know the plan of God.* He did not know what had taken place “backstage.” Satan claimed before God, “No man is good for nothing. Men serve you, because you give them prosperity. They exchange piety for privilege. Take away all that Job has, and he will curse you.” And the Lord responded to Satan’s challenge, “Behold, all that he has is in your hand.... Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life” (1:12, 2:6).

Please know that God was never out of control. Satan said, “But stretch out *your* hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face” (1:11). No secondary causes, no contingent will, no luck, no chance. No dualism, with two gods (the Lord and Satan) somehow sharing ultimate power. Likewise, Jesus spoke in the garden, “the cup which the *Father* has given me....” John Stam, a martyred missionary, called God “the one great Circumstance of life.”

Job knew God was sovereign. This conviction was his great enigma and the problem of his three friends. Why had God sent such great suffering into his life? He and they believed suffering was specific punishment for a specific sin. Certainly the nature of sin brought suffering, no question about that. But only rarely did a sin produce a specific ailment. Job’s friends pressed for his confession; Job labored in the knowledge that he had committed no such sin. And as he sought to worship and honor God (Chapters 1 and 2), his agony only multiplied. The “loathsome sores” (2:7) seemed a confirmation from heaven that God was displeased.

If only Job could have known what we know; that is, about the conversation between Satan and the Lord. If only he could have known the plan of God in such suffering. How much easier it would have been. But he did not know what was happening “backstage.” That information was simply not available to him.

Of course, you may say, neither is such insight available to you when you suffer. You cannot know with any assurance what the purpose and plan of God is in your anguish or pain. Like Job, you have to suffer in the dark, in uncertainty.

But for you there can be a difference. You can know with full assurance that the God of the plan loves you. He has pledged his love to us; he has proven his love to us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8). We can know beyond any doubt that the God of all circumstances is a God who loves us, whatever happens, no matter how great the tragedy, because he has once and for all demonstrated that love in the cross of his Son. Job did not know that, although with hope he may have looked for the coming of God's Redeemer.

*Second, Job did not know about Jesus.* In a remarkable burst of praise, he sang, "I know that my Redeemer lives" (19:25). And in words not quite so clear, he said, "Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and he who testifies for me is on high" (16:19). But he simply lived too soon to have full knowledge of Jesus. And so, from the valley of despair and depression, he came to feel that God was his mighty and high adversary, far removed from his suffering, too uninterested even to hear his cries or feel his tears. Did Job wave a clenched fist toward heaven, as his parched lips gave expression to his frustration: "There is no arbiter between us, who might lay his hand on us both" (9:33)?

Job had no mediator who could plead his case before God. He had no one to stand between himself and the Almighty, no one who could "lay his hand on us both." Only two were involved: God, mighty, unmovable, in majesty; Job, thrown down, helpless, in misery. How could Job win? How could he even argue his case against a God who seemingly didn't care? He simply did not know about Jesus. How terrible – terrifying – to understand the majesty and righteousness of God but not to know about Jesus!

But the Christian knows "there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all..." (1 Tim. 2:5b-6a).

Picture the Christian, picture yourself, in a hospital bed. The surgery is over, but the news is bad. Your body aches; pain can be relieved only briefly; hoses and tubes, tapes and bandages call your humanity and identity into question. Reading the Bible is far from your mind, and you don't want to pray. You want to sleep, for a few minutes, for an hour, forever.

Or imagine yourself burdened with cares, real and imagined. Your family and friends can't help you; no one else can feel this burden. It's all inside. You can't pray, and you can't read the Bible. No one cares; even in the midst of friends, you suffer alone.

But then remember Jesus. You belong to him. Even if you can't pray, he can and does. He has his hand on you, and he doesn't let go. You're his. You belong to the King, now, and forever. You are secure in him, not because of your unstable faith, but because of his unwavering faithfulness.

From your bed, out of misery, "Behold, the Lamb of God." Recall the blood of ancient sacrifices, sprinkled on the people of God, applied to them, and on God's altar, offered to him. Now one sacrifice has been made, sufficient forever. God has purchased his people, secure forever. The blood of Jesus has been applied to God's people and to

himself. We live and die in the presence of our risen Redeemer, who himself is in the presence of the Father. Feel the touch of his hand; his other hand is on the Father.

*Third, Job did not have a constant assurance about the resurrection.* He had seen trees cut down and later revived: “For there is hope for a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its shoots will not cease.... But a man dies and is laid low; man breathes his last, and where is he?” (14:7, 10). Later in 19:26 he sounds more confident. Job had served God, whether or not his friends believed that he had. And now into his life had come suffering from every direction. How tragic, if such a life ended in death – in nothing. Only Satan then could win.

Paul in I Corinthians 15 showed the tragic consequences if indeed the dead do not rise. If Christ did not rise, our preaching is empty, and our faith is hollow. In fact we are deceitful, for our gospel is a lie. We are yet lost in our sins. And those who “have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.” Paul added, “If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied” (I Cor. 15:19).

But his next words affirmed: “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”

Job asked this question, “If a man dies, shall he live again?” (14:14). By the grave of Lazarus, Jesus answered it: “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die” (John 11:25-26). Until Jesus’ answer, culminated in the empty tomb, people could only wonder, fear, perhaps hope. Now we can know. If the issue is Satan, Satan loses. Jesus meets his people at the levels of suffering and temptation and death (see Hebrews 2:14-18). And he wins, triumphant over death, now able to give his people grace and mercy when they need it.

You can know what Job did not know. Jesus’ empty tomb proclaims victory over Satan and sin. But it also lifts our eyes to an even greater day, when God “will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4). The victory of Jesus over death promises an eternal victory celebration for his people. So their view of temporary pain and anguish is different. Job didn’t know about the resurrection, but you do. What a difference!

*Finally, Job did not know where to find God.* At times he felt God was so great and so majestic, so removed and so distant from his suffering (see chapter 20). His friends’ theological system had no room for Job, and he couldn’t find God there. “Where to find God?” was his tormenting problem in circumstances he did not understand.

We now could tell Job about Calvary. Not that God was just somewhat involved in all that happened there, but that God was there. Not that the cross had something to do with him, but that he was on that cross. God is not removed from his people; he is not locked up in any theological system. He can be found in his Son, and at Golgotha. The

Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

What a difference Jesus can make. You can know that God’s will in your life is formed in the heart of a God who has pledged his love to you. You can know of one who prays for you, even when you don’t pray, or can’t. Jesus’ empty tomb assures your final victory. His death at Golgotha brings you into eternal relationship with God, your Father, no matter what. “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

\* (Revised from an article in *Eternity Magazine* May 1981 with permission from the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals)