

Sermon for Sunday, September 7, 1980, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor  
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"WHEN THE ROOF TUMBLES IN--WHAT THEN?"

Job 1:1-22

I want to talk about troubles this morning. All of us have problems and difficulties most of the time and on occasion troubles rises to such a crescendo that we may feel that we will be swept out into the sea of tragedy. I want to talk about trouble in relation to a man named Job. Everybody has heard of Job, so I won't spend time on the biblical description.

But let me make a couple of comments about Job as a man. The first observation I would make is that Job tried to stay out of trouble. For example, the Bible tells us that every morning this deeply religious man rose up early to offer burnt offerings to God for each of his children just on the chance that they might have sinned and gotten into trouble. One of the common views of that day was that if a man angered God, God punished him with trouble. Later on Job was to reject this view, but at this time in his life he tried to keep himself and his family out of trouble. I remember reading a story once about a river pilot. A passenger asked him if he knew where all the sand bars in the river were. "No," replied the pilot, "Why should I go banging about the river looking for sand bars--I know where the deep water is." Well, Job knew where the deep waters of righteousness before God were and he rose up early to offer sacrifices for his children. He wanted to keep himself and those he loved out of trouble.

Actually, we parents could take a great lesson from Job right here. Job is a far cry from so many parents today who leave their children to shift for themselves spiritually. We wouldn't think of turning small children loose to earn their own living, get their education the best they could, and to grow up on their own. We feel they need supervision, guidance, direction, and support. Yet, at the same time there are so many parents who are willing to let their children do the best they can for themselves spiritually. We hear a lot of talk today about the problems with youth, about the generation gap. I suspect that if all of us had Job's concern for the spiritual welfare of our children, the world would be much better off.

The second observation I want to make is that in spite of Job's efforts, trouble came any way. First, word came that all of his livestock had been stolen or destroyed. Second, word came that his children were dead in the rubble of a tornado. Disaster piled upon disaster until all he had was gone. Then, to put the frosting on disaster's cake, Job himself fell ill and his whole body was covered with great, festering boils.

Now, how are you going to understand trouble, when the roof tumbles in? As a matter of fact, I don't know anybody who doesn't have troubles or problems of one kind or another...and how do you understand it? When a little child is crippled, when a loved one is hit with cancer, when a mate is taken by death, how do you understand those things? Is it bad luck? Is it the anger of God? Is it a curse hanging over the family? At least in Job's case it wasn't sin because the Bible tells us that he was "...blameless and upright, one who feared God, and turned away from evil." Most of us can't say that. A lot of the disaster that comes into our lives is due to our sin--our greediness, our lust, our self-centeredness, our carelessness.

But even our sin can't account for all of the troubles, the problems, the disasters that come into our lives. Isn't it, then, a matter of fact that much of what happens to us is simply a part of the risk we run in being human? In that sense, then, there is so often no answer, no rhyme or reason, for trouble. It is simply part of the risk we run as human beings--humans who are susceptible to illness, humans whose bodies wear out and grow old, humans who live in a broken world and who often fall over the edge of that brokenness.

So the first observation is that Job tried to stay out of trouble and the second observation is that in spite of his efforts trouble came simply because he was a human being living in a real world and that brings its own disaster. The third observation I want to make is that when the roof tumbled in Job didn't take his troubles lightly. His sorrow was very deep and very intense. The Bible says that he rent his robe, shaved his head, and fell upon the ground. This was the most profound expression of grief that a Hebrew could make. His heart was simply crushed within him. When three of his friends came to call, the Bible says they sat beside him for seven days without saying anything because, as scripture puts it, "they say that his grief was very great." I know just exactly how they felt. So often when I go into a home where death has come, there is simply nothing to say. All you can do is just be there and try somehow to embody God's love and your love by your presence. Often when there is great tragedy there is simply nothing to say.

No, Job didn't take his troubles lightly. It is a fact of life that we cannot deaden pain or sorrow or trouble by denying its reality. The persons who deny their sorrow, their hurts, to their conscious mind are simply driving them into the unconscious mind where they will create havoc. Lot's of Christians have the mistaken idea that to express grief and sorrow during times of trouble is to show a lack of faith. Have you ever heard someone try to comfort a person who has lost a loved one? Usually it will go like this, "No, now don't cry. Everything is all right." Or, "Don't be sad. He is so much better off now." But when a loved one is gone forever and your eyes have beheld that beloved face for the last time, things are not all right. And while the one who is dead may indeed be better off, the one left behind is far worse off, impoverished in a companionship that can never be restored.

No, faith is not a short-circuit to by-pass mourning or troubles or sorrow. Faith is not a rabbit's foot that keeps us from feeling pain or hurt. No, faith has a different function. Faith let's us handle trouble when the roof tumbles in. Notice in the first place that Job could handle trouble because he believed life was ultimately in God's hands. Now, frankly Job didn't understand why trouble came to him and he cried out. "Why didn't I die from my mother's womb?" His wife didn't understand it and she said, "Why don't you curse God and die?" His friends thought they understood it and said, "Who ever perished, being innocent? Or when were the righteous cut off?" But Job knew that wasn't so. No, Job didn't know why he had troubles, but one thing he knew for certain. He knew that his life was ultimately in God's hands.

Now, that is the first step in handling trouble. You must have faith that God is ultimately in control of things. Is Russia or China in control of history? Is the atomic bomb bigger than God? Who or what is finally in charge of things? Job answered out of a profound faith, "God is." He said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." He was simply affirming his faith that life was ultimately in God's hands.

Someone once said to Livingston about his experiences in Africa where he lived among the natives, "How can you live among those people, never knowing from one minute to the next if they will put an arrow through you?" Livingston replied, "My life is in God's hands and I trust him. That is enough for me."

But Job took a second step in handling troubles when the roof tumbled in. Not only did he believe life was ultimately in God's hands, he also believed that God acted redemptively. Job's wife also believed that life was ultimately in God's hands. She stood helplessly before her tragedy, her sorrow, the loss of her children. Ultimately God was in control and in her frustration and tears she cried out to Job, "Curse God, and die." Curse this monster who had let all we

own and all we love be destroyed. Curse this God who ultimately controls all things and has let tragedy come upon us. But Job had taken the second step in riding trouble piggy back and out of his own heartbreak and sorrow he cried out, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth, and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." Yes, he believed that God who was ultimately in control of life, was a loving God who acted redemptively. As St. Paul was to express it centuries later, "All things work together for good to them that love God..."

I have a friend named Jim Wahlbrink who now runs a Star of Hope Mission in Spokane, Washington. At one time Jim himself was a hopeless drunk. His wife in her despair went to the store one day and bought poison, intending to put it in his coffee that night. Had her plan succeeded, today he would be in a drunkard's grave and his wife would be a murderess. But tragically that afternoon their little three year old boy was struck by a truck and was killed instantly. For Jim it was the turning point to God and sobriety. At the time he could not understand this terrible and tragic thing. But now, through the perspective of years, he can look back and see God working in the midst of tragedy to bring out of sorrow and despair some good thing. God did not kill Jim's boy--who is after all responsible for a little boy suddenly darting into the street into the path of a truck that cannot stop? But life is ultimately in God's hands and he used that tragedy to bring out of it a good thing--a sober man who has committed his life to helping others. When the roof tumbled in Jim, like Job, has learned that God who ultimately controls human history is also a God who works redemptively.

You know, it is interesting that Handel, when he came to write his great musical masterpiece, "The Messiah", went to the words of Job for one of his greatest songs, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." It is a song of faith that comes out of the darkness of despair. As some poet has put it, "And many a rapturous singer Among the sons of light Will say of his sweetest music I learned it in the night. And many a rolling anthem, that fills the Father's home Sobbed out its first rehearsal In the shade of a darkened room." And isn't it interesting too, to remember that when Handel wrote his masterpiece of faith that he was already going blind.

Some years ago an expedition set out for the South Pole. One of the members of the party was Edward Wilson. It was a disasterous expedition for none of the members were to survive. Later, when the remains of the men were found, a letter was found on the body of Edward Wilson addressed to his wife. As he faced a certain death he wrote, "I leave this life in absolute faith and happy belief that if God wishes you to wait long without me, it will be to some good purpose. All is for the best to those that love God, and we have loved him with all our lives. All is well. We have struggled to the end and we have nothing to regret. Our whole journey record is clean. Your little testament and prayer book will be in my hand or in my breast pocket when the end comes. All is well."

Edward Wilson had learned to handle troubles when the roof tumbled in. Yes, life is ultimately in God's hands and God who loves us in Jesus Christ always acts redemptively. When we can cry in faith with Job, "I know that my Redeemer liveth" then what ever life brings us we can greet it with the assurance that "all is well."