

Job 12 - 13

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[0 : 00] That song could have been Job's song in many ways, and it's from this old book that I want to speak this morning and to bring as our text the words of Job, chapter 13 and verse 15 in particular, that well-known word, though he slay me, yet will I hope in him.

And I'd like to introduce it by reference to another hymn, a hymn written by the famous Frances van Alsteyn, better known by her maiden name of Fanny Crosby, who, as you may know, was blind from the age of six weeks because of a tragic mistake by a doctor who I believe never got over the mistaken prescription that he gave, but she lived to be 95. In fact, when she was 83, she said she was in the prime of her life. Don't know what anybody might think of that if they happened to be 83. When she was a year old, her father died, and at the age of 12, she was sent to the New York Institute for the Blind and proved to be not a very enthusiastic pupil. And when I've spoken to children about Fanny Crosby before, I've referred to one of her little rhymes where she said, I loathe, abhor, it makes me sick to hear the word arithmetic. Well, she wrote a lot finer words than that, including, to God be the glory, blessed assurance, safe in the arms of Jesus, and all the way. A remarkable hymn which gives an expression of trust in God despite her troubles. She had an unhappy marriage as well, and she wrote in this hymn, all the way my Savior leads me. What have I to ask beside? Can I doubt His tender mercy, who through life has been my guide? Heavenly peace, divinest comfort, hereby faith in Him to dwell. For I know whate'er befall me, Jesus doeth all things well.

That's what Job was saying in our text, chapter 13, verse 15, though He slay me, yet will I hope in Him. Now, we should say at the start, if you have a Bible that has footnotes, you may see that the words could be translated differently, could be translated, He will slay me, I have no hope. That's how it's translated in the RSV, for example. Even although, I mean, even then, it's in the context of that persistent faith, actually, but without going into the details of Hebrew grammar, as if I could, I mean, you need somebody like a principal of ETS or somebody like that to come and do that sort of thing, there are good grounds for the translation that we have here, as the AV, the ESV, as well as the NIV, though He slay me, yet will I hope in Him. This is a faith that persists even when there are all manner of experiences that call it in question and all manner of questions that come to our rational minds. I mean, some people might have said to Job, how can you possibly believe despite all that has happened to you? And chapter 1, if you remember the story, let me just refresh your mind. Chapter 1 tells us of Job as a godly man who suffered one calamity after another. First, the loss of his property. Second, the loss of his family. And third, the loss of his health. One thing after another. Things caving in upon him. And even his own wife told him that he should just give up, give up all this naive faith, never mind in an almighty God, never mind a God of love.

[4 : 07] And in some ways, she might have said to Fanny Crosby, what do you mean Jesus doeth all things well? And for now, well, hasn't the world been full of disasters and tragedies that would defy anyone to have faith in a God of love? You could make your list of names that conjure up a whole catalog of terrible things, depending on your age, Lockerbie, Aberfan, Dunblane, Columbine, Twin Towers, Manchester Arena, Westminster Bridge, and so on. These things actually were mostly the direct result of human wickedness, but there are also such things as earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, and so on. And some people would say, and some people do say, if there's a God in heaven, why does He allow such things to go on?

And more challengingly, how can you persist with your belief in a God of love in the teeth of so many awful things? Now, I'm not really going into that big question as such today. There are things that we can say about it. For one thing, the fact that many of the troubles of the world, perhaps most, are actually man-made troubles. Secondly, the fact that the world operates by means of certain laws of nature, so that something dropped to the ground falls down, which is fine. But of

course, it does also mean that people can get hurt. And then there is the fact, thirdly, of our limited understanding and knowledge. And we might put it this way. Imagine that you knew nothing about surgery, and you went into a special room and saw a man in a gown taking a sharp scalpel and cutting open somebody's body.

Wouldn't we think it was cruel and should be stopped? But of course, we know there's a positive good at the end of it. And on the larger scale, there may be reasons that we just cannot take in. Faith says with another hymn writer that there will come a day when I'll bless the hand that guided, I'll bless the heart that planned when throned where glory dwelleth in Emmanuel's land.

And of course, finally on that subject, there is the fact of the suffering of Jesus Himself. The fact that God has come into this world of pain and suffering, and through suffering, has opened up a way of salvation. So yeah, there are some things that can be said about that big issue. But here, we're looking at the example of one man who suffered more than most, Job, in the midst of this catalogue of calamities that came upon him, aggravated by the sad attempts of his so-called comforters. And here we have him, actually a sad wreck of a man. And the book does include many anguished cries in his pain and torment, but we find him looking up and saying, even if it gets worse yet, even if he takes my life, yet I will trust in him as a God who does all things well, who has his reasons, even when I can't see them, a God who is worthy of trust.

[7 : 45] When so many people would go in the opposite direction and say, because such and such happens, I can't any longer believe in a good and loving God, Job comes away with this great assertion of faith. And thank God, we might say, this is not the trite expression of somebody who's never known a day's adversity in his life, but the testimony of one who has come through so much. And you can think probably of similar instances. There was a member of the congregation that I served whose life was a catalogue of troubles. This is the sort of thing I'm talking about. This man, actually his father had been a senior elder who suffered a stroke and then was unable to speak afterwards, although, interestingly enough, sometimes he could sing, get words out singing, but he couldn't speak.

His mother devotedly looked after her husband and Nicol until she was worn out and died. His brother was a fisherman and was lost at sea. He himself was paralyzed by MS, and then his marriage broke up. And I sometimes wondered if much more could happen to that family. And during one of my visits, I often felt actually that in some ways he was more of a pastor to me than I to him.

But I remember one time when he said in a slow voice, the one thing that really bothers me is, and of course, very slow speech, and I'm sort of almost gristing my teeth, wondering, bracing myself. I was expecting some complaint about the unfairness of it all, and how could anybody believe in a God that allows all these things to happen? The one thing that really bothers me, he said, is all these murders and crimes. And it turned out he was more bothered about man's inhumanity to man than all these troubles that had crowded into his life. In fact, I've written elsewhere about it. I have often observed in pastoral ministry that often it is not the people who do the suffering, mostly who raise the big questions about the power and love of God and how to reconcile them. But here's Job with this tremendous assertion of faith, though he slay me, yet will I hope in him.

There was a minister, some of you have heard of him, called A.J. Gossip, who ministered not far from here. He was in Beach Grove Church at one time, who preached a famous sermon, to which I'll refer later on. And it was preached just after the sudden death of his wife. And the elders of the church wanted it to be put into print, which it was, and it was published under the title, When Life Caves In, What Then?

That was a question for Job. Are my experiences... It's the question for us as well. Are my experiences, especially my unwelcome experiences, are they going to make me a bitter person or a better person?

[11 : 04] There's only one letter of difference between these words, but there's a world of difference between them. A bitter person or a better person. And as we consider that text, I want to refer, first of all, to Job's devotion. And then we'll come on to other things after that. His devotion, which is beyond doubt. And in a way, the very first verse of the book sets the scene. It says there, in the land of Uz, there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright. He feared God and shunned evil. And just in the opening verses, we learn about what Job was in himself, what he was to his family, and what he was to God. As to what he was in himself, he's described as a good and godly man. And of course, that's what constitutes the problem. If the

suffering, which is to be described in the many chapters of this book, had come upon a wicked scoundrel who had defied and cursed and blasphemed God, then it might have fitted into the sort of conventional theories about suffering. But the whole point is that Job was a good man. Not a perfect man, of course, but still, upright and godly. One who, as the last phrase of the first verse says, shunned evil. Or as another version has it, set his face against wrongdoing. Of course, when it says he feared God, that doesn't mean he was frightened of God, but it does mean that he respected and honored God. He had that reverence and awe that is the proper attitude from a human being toward the Creator.

That's what he was in himself. Secondly, these verses tell of what he was to his family. And we read in the first chapter about happy visits back and forth within the family. And indeed, the procedure of chapter 1 verse 5 indicates Job's concern for the spiritual well-being of his family.

And without going into the detail of the sacrifices offered, the thing is that he was concerned for their deepest well-being, and he prayed for them. This, it says, was Job's regular custom.

Now, it's true, his family had grown up. They had to make their own decisions, including their own response to the Lord. But Job would do everything possible to bring them to the Lord. And the end of verse 5 in that chapter says he was concerned not just about their actions, but their hearts, what they were in themselves, what they were before the Lord. Now, obviously, in all of that, as an aside, he sets a tremendous example for those of us that are parents or grandparents.

Among the many ways in which we can show love and concern for the young, there should be this paramount thing, a concern for their spiritual well-being. And thirdly, in these opening verses, we find out what Job was before God. Verse 8 of that chapter says, the Lord said to Satan, have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him. He is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. The most important thing about any person is not what he or she appears to be to other people, but what he or she is before God. And here is a marvelous testimony, as it were, from God himself about Job's character. That's the kind of man he was.

[14:55] In himself, to his family, before his God, there is his devotion. But secondly, when we speak of his desolation, if we were to read through the chapters of Job, we would find many expressions of his agony.

After losing his wealth, his family, and his health, he was a wreck, really. For example, chapter 7, verse 4, when I lie down, I think, how long before I get up? The night drags on, and I toss till dawn. My body is clothed with worms and scabs. My skin is broken and festering. Earlier on, chapter 3, verse 3, he said, may the day of my birth perish. And the night it was said, a boy is born, that day may it turn to darkness. It's like saying, may the date of my birthday be blotted out of the calendar. And in the beginning of chapter 10, he even says, I loathe my very life. And it's all about why. That's the big question. The words of the text are part of Job's response to the things said by his comforters.

Chapter 11 gives Zophar's advice to Job in his troubles, and he had one simple equation, do good and you'll be rewarded, do evil and you'll be punished. Simple as that.

There's a song, which I dare say many people here have heard, because it's in a film that is shown year after year after year, from Captain Von Trapp in *The Sound of Music*. You'll know it, I'm sure, but I'll just read the words rather than try to do a, what was his name, Christopher Plummer, was it?

[16:44] Perhaps I had a wicked childhood. Perhaps I had a miserable youth. But somewhere in my wicked, miserable youth, there must have been a moment of truth. For here you are, standing here, loving me, whether or not you should. So somewhere in my youth or childhood, I must have done something good.

It's quite a nice song, but the theology is rubbish, utter rubbish, because the whole trouble is that the world so often seems to be ill-peared to it, as we say. Zophar has his little syllogism. We can put it up on the screen there. Simple thing. Suffering comes as a punishment for sin. Job is suffering, therefore Job must have sinned. Simple as that. And Job, no doubt, had sinned, as we all have, but his protest comes out loud and clear against the idea that you can make such easy equations. In chapter 11, verse 11, we hear Zophar saying, surely God recognizes deceitful men, and when he sees evil, does he not take note? And there at the end of verse 6, he even says, Job, know this, God has forgotten some of your sin. That's like, you know, piling on the agony, suggesting that Job should actually consider himself lucky that he isn't suffering more than he is, some comforter.

And his remedy, it's very simple. Verse 14, if you put away the sin that is in your hand and allow no evil to dwell in your tent, then you will lift up your face without shame. You will surely forget your

trouble, recalling it only as water has gone by. That's his answer to Job's desolation. But Job rejects it. And there's where we came in. Doubtless you are the people, chapter 12, verse 1, and wisdom will die with you. That's his ironic comment on the uselessness of their supposedly wise words. And in chapter 12, he speaks of that theme of God being in control, not fate, not blind chance, but God, the righteous judge of the earth. I know that whatever befall me, he does all things well. And even when I see through a glass darkly, I will trust in him.

And now in chapter 13, he has his answer to the many words of his would-be comforters. He says in verse 5, we read that, but if only you would be altogether silent, for you that would be wisdom. That's his answer to Zophar's words. In chapter 11, verse 2, where he burst out, are all these words to go unanswered? Actually, the best answer to that would have been yes. Yes, there comes a time when the best help you can give to somebody is just silence, just listen. And maybe some of us here could testify to that. There have been times when you've been having difficulties, and the last person to help is the loud-mouthed, cocksure person who comes along to do you good, whether you like it or not, and he or she has all the answers. That's the impression they give anyway. The late George Philip went so far as to write about it. There is nothing quite so nauseating as the prattle of those who talk as if they know all there is to know about God. That is indicative of nothing but spiritual pride and shallowness of character and intellect. And so it is that Job bursts out now, chapter 13, verse 5, if only you would be altogether silent. Of course, there's a time to speak. We know that.

[20 : 48] But Job longed for the sympathy of people who would just share his suffering. His devotion, we thought of his desolation. And the other thing, and this is, I suppose, bringing us to the heart of the text, is his decision. Through it all, he has come to this decision, this resolve, this reaffirmation of the faith that he had had. Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him. And remember, this is an Old Testament book. There wasn't actually anything like the sure belief in the life to come, which was brought out in the New Testament. I mean, it is true, over the page in chapter 14, verse 14. Job asks the question, if a man dies, shall he live again? And the implied answer is no, but maybe there's a ray of light. Maybe this life is not all that there is. Maybe death is not a final terminus. But by and large, there wasn't the assured hope of what the New

Testament teaches us about the many mansions above. And doesn't that make Job's decision, his statement of faith, all the more remarkable? Let me put it starkly as a challenge and say, would you and I bother about trusting and worshiping and following him if there were no hope of heaven, no gift of eternal life awaiting God's faithful people? Well, I hope so, that we would follow him because his way is the truth. He is the truth, and his promise is of the best way and the most fulfilling way to live our lives in this world. But here's the challenge from a faith that was not just for sunny days, but held in the storms of life. Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.

I will still believe, even though I can't see the whole picture. It's the faith of Psalm 46 that we're going to come to at the end of the service that says, God is our refuge. And then, if you remember, that psalm goes on with a series of those. Though this happens, or that happens, no matter, it says there, what kind of cataclysmic or apocalyptic disasters take place, we will not fear for God is over all. It's a faith like that of the famous Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, thrown into the fiery furnace and saying, the God we serve is able to save us and rescue us from your hand, O King. But even if he does not, we want you to know that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up. Wonderful words again, even if God doesn't act in the way that we want, let God be God, and we will trust that he knows best. Or again, like the faith of Habakkuk with his word at the end of that book, though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.

So Job is in a goodly company of those who exemplify such faith to us, that faith that even when we don't understand Romans 8, 28, what does it say? In all things God works, all things work together for good to those who love him. The God whose plan of salvation was worked out through the epitome of unjust suffering at Calvary, on the day when it must have seemed to so many people as if all heaven and earth had gone crazy, when the very Son of God was nailed to a cross, though he had done no wrong.

I referred earlier to A.J. Gossip's famous sermon from Beach Grove. He admitted that there were things he couldn't understand about life, but he also said that he couldn't understand how in loss people could abandon their faith, and he said in four simple words, abandon it for what?

[25 : 39] Like Peter saying when asked whether the disciples would, like some others, want to go and desert Christ saying, Lord, to whom should we go? You have the words of eternal life. Here's gossip. Let me quote a bit.

It's actually in the language of more than a hundred years ago, but here it is, and he refers to a famous incident from our Scottish history. I don't think anyone will challenge my right to speak today, and what I want to say is this. When Claverhouse suddenly shot John Brown of Priest Hill, he, the callous brute, turned to the wife and asked, what think ye now of your broad weed man? And she, gathering together the scattered brains, made answer, I thought muckle of him, but I think more of him now.

I always thought muckle of the Christian faith, but I think more of it now, far more. That's the quotation, that's the voice of somebody who had walked through the valley and who said, though I walk through death's dark veil, yet I will fear none ill, for you are with me.

Job would have agreed with that. Abandon it for what? He would have said, sure, there are things I don't understand. I don't know why God is allowing me to pass through all these trials, but I can only say this, that there is no other way. And it makes far more sense with faith in the Lord than it would if you abandon that faith. To whom else should we go? To whom else should we go in times of trial and adversity than to the living God whose words are the words of life, the one who has the whole world in his hands and who died for the salvation of all who will in simple repentance and faith receive that salvation? That was Job's decision. Is it yours and mine? Just as I am, though tossed about with many a conflict, many a doubt, fightings and fears within, without, O Lamb of God, I come. And let me add this, that this is not a matter of pretense, as if we kind of desperately kid on that there must be a meaning somehow. Nor are we talking about a placebo religion, which may or may not be true, but so long as it makes things more palatable, that's all that matters. That is not all that matters, and Job would have no time for that. And it's certainly not a case of holding on to this just because there's nothing better. In fact, there is nothing better. But the thing is, what could be better than this message of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, that God so loved the world in all its pain and suffering and sin that He gave His Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life? I used to be the chairman of the organization that some of you know of called SOLAS, the Center for Public Christianity, and in that time edited a little book entitled, Why We Still Believe. There's the cover. Still? One reviewer of it wrote this, my year nine English teacher told me that words in brackets will often communicate the greatest meaning, and so it is with this collection of essays. Still means, yes, despite all the current attacks of secularism and atheism and all the rest, despite all the implications that nobody nowadays still believes in all that stuff which may have been fine for a less sophisticated age, but nobody believes in this enlightened age any longer. And so there are chapters on why I still believe in evangelism, in the Bible, in a Creator, in preaching, in marriage, in public Christianity, and so on. All things that have been under attack and that many would have us jettisoned.

[30 : 26] This text that we've been considering could be thought of as Job's contribution to why we still believe. Still, after all that has happened, and for the future, though He slay me, yet will I hope in Him. And whether you've had Job's devotion or not, whether you have been through anything of the kind of desolation that Job experienced or not, what about his decision? The decision to commit yourself to this great God, this great Redeemer, who ever lives, who died, who would live a perfect life, who died a perfect death, a death that conquered sin and death forever. And it's above all when we view the cross of Calvary and when we can say, I know that my Redeemer lives, which is the text that I would take up in the evening service today. When we can say, I know that my Redeemer lives, that's why I still believe. It's my faith and my hope as well. And whatever happens today or tomorrow, whatever experiences of life, you and I may be called to pass through, even though He slay me, yet will I hope in Him.

I hope and pray that that's the decision of all of us here. Let's pray to God about it. Heavenly Father, we give thanks that this book is in the Bible, this book about the sufferings of this good man who suffered so much and yet who persisted with this faith in you, the living, Almighty God, who works out your purposes in all the things that happen. Give us, O Lord, we pray, the faith that says, I know whatever befall me, Jesus doeth all things well, that all things work together for good, that each part, everything that happens has a place in this tapestry of providence.

And Lord, we pray that you would grant us in increasing measure that faith so that whatever happens to us in this life, whatever experiences we may be called upon to go through, we may

indeed say, I know that my Redeemer lives. And even whatever happens, even though He slay me, yet will I hope and trust in Him. May this be so, O Lord. Make us to be attentive and responsive hearers of your word. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, we ask it. Amen.