

# Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, June 23, 2024  
"Who's to Blame?"

## *Young at Heart Message*

Today, we're talking about the story of Job.

In the spirit of this story, I thought it might be helpful to illustrate the story using a parallel story.

So, I'd like to share a story written from the point of view of none other than Kanyon the Bernese Mountain Dog.

Here is a picture of him to put us into his story, and then I'll let him take it from there:



*I have an AMAZING life!*

*I am such a good boy, and I know this because my mom tells me every day.*

*I get two delicious meals a day, I have access to bones to chew on all the time, I get to walk around the neighbourhood and meet up with my friends almost every day, and I get to run off leash all the time.*

*I think I am a pretty wealthy dog, in terms of dog wealth anyway.*

*No amount is too much to pay for my dog food. At least, that's what mom tells me.*

*I get to go to daycare sometimes, and honestly, someone always picks up after me when I use the "bathroom." I mean come on – how many of you can say that?! You can't get any richer than that!*

*I am so wealthy and my life is so good because I'm such a good boy – I listen to my mom (most of the time), and I never do anything bad (most of the time).*

*So, imagine my surprise when one day, mom picked up all the bones, and said I couldn't have any food, and I couldn't go play with my friends, and it rained on my head.*

*And then, to make matters worse, my mom took me to this place where they shaved the hair on my belly, put me to sleep, and when I woke up, I was sore and in pain and wearing this horrible plastic thing around my neck.*

*What on EARTH could I have done to deserve this?*

*I don't think I did anything wrong, ever.*

*Mom always said I was a good boy. Did she lie?*

*Things didn't get better when I got home. She still wouldn't let me eat, or play with my friends, or chew my bone, or run around at all.*

*I couldn't get comfortable because of the silly plastic thing around my neck.*

*On top of ALL of that, my nemesis came out of the closet, made loud noises, and sucked up all my hair that I worked so hard to dispense on the floor.*

*I asked my sister Lacey why I was getting treated so horribly, and why she was still allowed to eat, and chew, and go for walks.*

*She told me that I must have done something wrong for mom to treat me so poorly.*

*She guessed that I probably wasn't as good of a boy as I thought I was.*

*WHAT?! I am such a good boy! I've always been a good boy. This just isn't a reasonable answer.*

*Mom is just being mean to me for the sake of being mean. I know it.*

*In fact, I want to give mom a piece of my mind. I want to get her to answer for these crimes against me!*

*This isn't right!*

*Lacey says I must have been a bad dog, but I don't know how or when. I just don't think it's possible.*

*I cursed my mom over and over, howling about how awful she was being and how I didn't deserve such treatment.*

*I've always been a good dog. I've never done anything wrong. Ever.*

*I don't deserve this. Why doesn't she just end this. My life is horrible and I don't see a point in it.*

*I had a great life, and now I don't. It's awful. I can't stand it anymore.*

*And then finally, mom answered my howls.*

*She told me that sometimes, life is bigger than what I know or could understand.*

*I wasn't being punished for being a bad dog originally, but I was kind of being a bad dog now. I mean, I admittedly was blaming her for things that she says were out of her control.*

*It doesn't seem that way to me though. It seems like she's doing this to me intentionally.*

*But she says the world is bigger than me.*

*It's not my fault, but it's not her fault either, and there are things about the world that I just can't understand.*

*So, I guess I should let her off the hook.*

*Maybe she doesn't think I'm a bad dog. Maybe I just don't understand why this had to happen to me.*

*Maybe, tomorrow will be a little better than today.*

*And maybe the next day, even a bit better.*

*And maybe mom does still love me, and wasn't trying to be mean just for the sake of being mean.*

*I guess only time will tell.*

## **The Message**

If you couldn't tell, Kanyon's tale of misery and despair, from his perspective, was supposed to parallel to some extent the story of Job.

In preparation for today's sermon, I actually read the entire book of Job.

The passage that we heard today was God's response to Job, which comes only after 37 other chapters of lament, complaining, and arguments with Job's friends.

In a long nutshell, here's what happens in the book of Job:

Job's life starts out very well - he's wealthy, he's honest inside and out, he's a man of his word, totally devoted to God, and he hated evil with a passion.

He had 7 sons and 3 daughters, 7000 head of sheep, 3000 camels, 500 teams of oxen, 500 donkeys, and a huge staff of servants. He was the most influential man of the East!

After we learn this about Job, we see an interesting exchange happen between God and Satan.

God sings Job's praises to Satan, and Satan responds by saying "well sure, but you pamper him like a pet, and you bless everything he does! He can't lose!"

Satan bets that if God took everything away from Job, Job would end up cursing God. Essentially, Satan claims that Job is only good because he's blessed.

So God tells Satan fine, take away everything Job has and see what happens.

Job responds to having all of his possessions and riches taken away by not sinning or blaming God.

So God tells Satan "see! He's still good and still doesn't sin or curse me!"

And Satan says yeah well, I bet if you took away his health too, he would curse you.

So God gives Satan permission to take away his health, but not kill him.

Now, I find this part of the story troubling, because it implies an indifferent God – a God who messes with people's lives or tests them for his own amusement.

This doesn't seem like something a loving God would do.

But, we have to keep in mind that the theological perspective at this time was that God micromanaged people's lives.

So, in the prevailing worldview, this isn't odd.

So, Satan strikes Job with horrible itchy sores that were oozing and uncomfortable.

And Job's wife asks him why he doesn't just curse God and be done with it.

I imagine that Job's wife is suffering terribly at this point as well, considering the losses they have both experienced.

Job responds to her initially by saying "we take the good days from God, why not also the bad days."

This seems like an odd response – it makes Job appear incredibly devoted to God initially, despite the terrible things that have happened to him.

But, he also hasn't been dealing with the ailments for all that long yet.

At this point in the story, Job's three friends come to join him, and they sit with him for 7 days and 7 nights in silence, until finally Job speaks.

And when Job speaks, he cries out, wondering what the point of life even is at this point.

The bulk of the rest of the Book of Job is Job arguing with his friends as they try to argue in various ways that he must have done something to deserve this treatment.

And Job keeps stubbornly responding to their arguments saying how awful they are treating him.

He also continually complains that he should be able to put God on trial to answer for these things that have happened to him.

Finally, we come to chapter 38. We read verses 1-11 today – the first time God directly responds to Job's accusations.

And what we hear from God isn't exactly a satisfying response if you put yourself in Job's shoes.

The theology of the day is such that God directly intervenes in people's lives.

So when God replies with more of a cosmological answer, we as readers feel perhaps a bit frustrated.

God essentially tells Job that he's talking a lot about things he knows nothing about.

Then, God goes on to list a whole bunch of questions for Job, which begins to put things into perspective.

He asks first "where were *you* when I created the earth? Tell me, since you know so much!"

God asks a lot of questions like:

"Who do you suppose carves canyons for the downpours of rain," "Do you know the first thing about the sky's constellations and how they affect things on Earth?", "Can you teach the lioness to stalk her prey and satisfy the appetite of her cubs?"

Job responds and says he's ready to shut up and listen. God continues with more questions: "Do you presume to tell me what I'm doing wrong? Are you calling me a sinner so you can be a saint? I'll gladly step aside and hand things over to you - you can surely save yourself with no help from me!"

Job finally says "I'm convinced: You can do anything and everything. Nothing and no one can upset your plans."

The story ends by God blessing Job once again and "restoring him."

Whew! What a story!

As I briefly mentioned, this story evidenced the theology of the time - that God has total control over our lives and can bless us and take away our blessings on a whim.

Ultimately though, what this story is conveying is that God is so much vaster and more mysterious than we could ever understand.

Our human nature is rather selfish - we can only understand God in terms of how our own lives are affected.

This theological assumption that God blesses those who are good and righteous, and God punishes those who are sinful is problematic and closed-minded.

For example, Pat Robertson publicly announced that the earthquake in Haiti in 2010 was caused by the people of Haiti's "pact with the devil."

This theology assigns moral blame for natural disasters.

It allows those who were not affected to believe that God somehow spared them because of their moral superiority, while the people of Haiti were being punished because of their sinfulness.

The story of Job in a lot of ways highlights this type of theology, so I can see where someone like Pat Robertson, who claims to read the Bible literally, might read this story and say "see, God punishes those who are sinful and blesses those who are righteous."

But, we have to remember that this story was written and shared in a time and place when humanity's understanding of the world and of God was very different.

This story happened well before Jesus was sent to humanity. Jesus teaches a theology that is very different than this - he offers grace and takes away this mentality that God is to blame for all things that happen to us - good or bad.

It is hard for me to believe, and therefore would be almost impossible to preach, that God works the way the people in Job's time thought God worked.

How could a loving God play with people's lives in the way described in Job?

God's response reflects the theology of the time, but the greater point God makes in the reply to Job is that we cannot possibly understand how God works in our world.

The story of Job is an attempt to understand something that is not understandable.

God created a world of intricacies in which our individual lives are part of a much larger, far more vast system - a small part of the grand cosmos of God's design.

It is not that our lives are insignificant, it is that our lives are part of something so much greater than ourselves.

Blaming God when bad things happen, or blaming our own sins, diminishes God to a being that micromanages everything, and reduces the impact of free will on our lives.

It's not that God doesn't care about us. God joins us in both our pain and our joy, and walks with us, and occasionally even carries us through the hard times.

God doesn't punish us in the way Job and others in this time period thought.

When we consider all of God's creation, and not just our own lives, we can see hope and joy in the way that all of creation is connected, and in the fact that we are connected to everyone and everything else in ways we could never fully comprehend.

And, no matter what we think, no matter what anyone says, God loves us and offers us grace through all of it. Amen.

Let us pray:

God of all Creation, sometimes the storms frighten us and we cry to you. Sometimes our challenges are great and we tremble. Sometimes the storms are around us, and sometimes they are within. Speak your word of peace to us, so that we may endure our storms and face our difficulties with peace and faith. We open our hearts to your grace. Amen.

Prayer from Unfolding Light, <https://unfoldinglight.net/2009/12/01/ot-12-pe-4/>