

Elle Campbell Funeral Service
Job 1:21
June 11, 2015

INTRODUCTION:

I've chosen this text today for two reasons. First, it seems to fit the circumstances of Elle's life so well. God gave this child to this family in a manner that emphasized the nature of her as a gift. Zac and Allie thought they were done having children after their third child, Cooper, was born. Elle was not in their plans or expectations, and her arrival was a clear gift from God. Like all God's gifts, she brought a unique set of joys. For such a little girl, she lived life large. I'm told that she loved to sing so much and so loudly that Zac and Allie would have to quiet her so the family could just have normal conversations. She loved to dance as well, sometimes to music being played in the house and sometimes supplying the music for her dances all by herself. She was affectionate. I'm told that she loved to get up from the dinner table and go to each family member, give them a kiss and tell them that she loved them. Zac and Allie even had to limit her to two trips around the table with her hugs and expressions of love. It was not easy to take a nap around Elle, because she would approach a napping family member and plant a big, loud kiss on them that would invariably awaken them. She loved speed, and liked to take her ziggle scooter to the tops of hills, even the steep one at their house, and fly down the hill at speeds that frightened her parents. She had some spunk, once grabbing the arm of the nurse seeking to do one of those reflex tests with the small rubber mallet and demanding, "Leave me alone." Cooper reflected recently, "I miss her fussing at me."

She was indeed a precious gift, but one now that the Lord has taken away just one month short of her fourth birthday. Our hearts ask the question asked by sufferers everywhere. "Why, O Lord?" Why this one? Why did you give her only now to take her? And why didn't you grant the prayers made to you by literally thousands of your children, asking that Elle be healed of this dreadful brain tumor. Job's story is the place in the Bible where these questions are dealt with more directly than anywhere else in the Bible. I would like us to do a quick survey of the book of Job and the answers it supplies to us as our hearts ask why this precious little girl was so soon taken from us.

I. There Is Meaning in our Suffering.

The readers of this book are told up front something that Job never learned. His awful trials began as the result of something that happened in heaven. Satan, whose name means the "accuser," brought an accusation against Job. His accusation was that Job was a mercenary, serving God only

because God was paying him in the form of wealth, health and abundant children. His seven sons were so wealthy that they each had their own house, where they would host a feast one day a week, rotating between them. His three daughters were not left out, for they were included in these feasts. Such wealth would be quite unusual in this day. So Satan remarked on what good wages God paid, and then brought the accusation designed to bring great hurt to the heart of God. "Job only serves you because of all that you've given him. He doesn't really love you at all. Take away his wealth and his children and he will curse you instead of love you." Satan was striking where it would hurt the most. God's great purpose was to raise up a people who would be in relationship with him. Satan is mocking God here, saying that even the most exemplary person on the earth was using God, not loving him. So Satan made a wager with God. "Allow the removal of all he has and he will curse you openly."

God allowed this, saying to Satan, "**Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand**" (1:12). Note the two things taught there. First, it is Satan, not God, who brought the destruction. Second, though God is not the author of such evil, he is still sovereign over it. He sets the boundary lines for how far evil is allowed to go, and it can go that far and no further. God is not the author of such evil things as brain tumors in three-year old girls, but he is sovereign over it. We do not believe in dualism, that there are two forces in the universe, one good and one evil, fighting for supremacy. There is only one force, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and he is in control of all things. Further, even the evil that he allows ends up serving his good purposes. We can see that with Job himself. Satan said that Job served God selfishly, not really loving God at all. Undoubtedly, since Job was a sinner like the rest of us, that was at least partially true. But the outcome of these trials was a deeper love for God in Job's heart. Once again, Satan overplayed his hand.

So Job was struck by the evil hand of Satan, and what a mighty blow it was! In one day, he lost all his property and the lives of all ten children. But Satan lost the wager, because Job responded in worship. "**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.**" Satan lost round 1. But there is more to come. Satan challenges God again and says that if a man loses his health, he will surely deny God. Once again, God grants permission for Satan to take this as well, and Job suffers mightily. This time, the path to worship takes longer, spanning the rest of the book.

The point I want to make now, though, is that there was meaning in Job's suffering, though he didn't know what it was. There was the greatest possible meaning in his case, the glory of God. The armies of angels were watching and hoping for Job's love for God to be preserved. The demons, too, were watching and rooting for the opposite. Job knew none of this, and we don't either. What

we do know is that there is meaning in this suffering, and it is probably greater than we know. God loves his children, and he doesn't allow us to suffer pointlessly.

II. There Is an Explanation for our Suffering

After many chapters of dialogue and argument between Job and his "friends," God shows up to give an explanation. I note that he shows up in a storm. Zac and Allie reminded me that when God took Elle home early Tuesday morning, a storm was blowing through Birmingham. Storms in the Bible are signs of God's anger and judgment. But God is not angry at Job, though Job had complained bitterly about his treatment, saying it would have been better had he never been born. He doubted and he shouted, but God didn't find fault with Job for that, because job complained *to* God and not *about* God. That is a form of prayer that is called lament in the Bible, and it has an extensive and commendable presence in the Bible. Job's suffering drove him toward God, not away from God.

So what is the object of God's anger when he appears before Job in a storm? He is angry at the brokenness of this world and he is angry at Job's friends. Job's friends believed that the reason for Job's suffering was Job's sin. They believed that he must have done something wrong to deserve such suffering. In the words of Eliphaz, **"Hardship does not spring from the soil, nor does trouble sprout from the ground"** (5:6). We are all prone to believe such things, but they are not true. The truth is the exact opposite in Job's case. He didn't suffer because of his sin but because of his uprightness, because he loved God. Zac and Allie, don't swallow Satan's lies that this has happened to you because of something you have done wrong. Remember the gospel. God treats us not as we deserve, but as Jesus deserves. Jesus was judged for our badness and we are rewarded because of Jesus' goodness.

Why then did Job suffer? What explanation does God give? You've probably read the chapters before, and noted that God never explains to Job what the reader knows. He doesn't say, "Job, there was this meeting in heaven, but now your suffering is over and you will be rewarded handsomely and millions of people throughout human history are going to read your story and be encouraged." What he does instead is to give Job a test, asking him a whole series of questions that illustrate the vast gulf there is between Job's understanding and God's. He doesn't tell Job why this happened, but reminds him to trust God even when he doesn't understand. Job will have to trust that there are things God knows that we just can't understand, and he directs our paths out of his greater understanding. I like the way Tim Keller words this in his book about suffering. God "gives us what we would have asked for if we had known everything he knows."

What is the alternative? The alternative is to proudly think that we know how best God should run the world. But when we seize control of our lives and think that we know best how to run our lives, it ends badly. We want to force some result, and in doing so we usurp God's role and end up leading to more evil, not less. So without explaining himself, God simply says, "Trust me. I know things you don't know, and my heart toward you is good." The great divide between people on this planet is between the proud who trust themselves and the humble who trust God. The former path leads to evil and death, the latter to life and vindication.

How do we know that God's heart toward us is good and that we can trust him? Because of Jesus. A God who would die for us even while we were his enemies has a heart that is good toward us.

III. There Is a Reward for our Suffering

The end of the book describes the restoration of Job's fortunes, double what he had before. Some cynically think this ending was added later just to make it a feel good story. I don't think so. The Bible many times promises us about the everlasting joy that comes with the life to come. As our hearts are heavy at this time, let me just mention some of the rewards that God promises to us all.

1. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. On Tuesday night shortly after 1:00 a.m., Elle Campbell left her material body and was welcomed into the presence of God. She saw Jesus and, as John tells us, became like him by seeing him (1 John 3:2). She is in the glorious presence of Jesus now, and she has preceded us all into that everlasting joy God promises to his children. It will feel like a long time for most of us before we see Elle again, but it won't be so for her. Do you remember how quickly summer vacation passed when you were in school. Days filled with childhood joys seemed to fly by, so that it seemed that summer ended right after it started. How much more so will that be the case for Elle. When you see her next, she will be thinking, "So soon?" I like the way John Piper said it in a letter he wrote to a woman whose son was stillborn. "But you will know him. God will see to that. And he you. And he will thank you for giving him life. He will thank you for enduring the loss that he might have the reward sooner."
2. "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20). Elle will one day have the body you've always wanted for her. It will live forever, just like the immortal body of Jesus. Your little girl will be able to sing and dance her way through eternity. She will live life large with every day bringing forth new joys. You will recognize her and she you. You mentioned to me that she had a strong will. When sanctified, that is a gift from God. When

unsanctified, that is a source of trouble. When you next see Elle, you will see a completely sanctified Elle. You will not have to suffer through the unsanctified strong will.

CONCLUSION:

Elle's last word.

Jesus taught that we all live forever, either in a place of torment called hell, or in the place of everlasting joy with him. He invites any who want to live with him in the place of everlasting joy. All that is required is to stop trusting yourself and to trust him. We trust him to forgive us for thinking we know how best to run our lives, and all the trouble that brings to us. And we trust him to run our lives, giving up control and gladly giving it over to the one who has loved us and died for us.