

Job

4 10 15

Almighty and everlasting God,
increase in us your gift of faith
that, forsaking what lies behind
and reaching out to that which is before,
we may run the way of your commandments
and win the crown of everlasting joy.

Our text may be found at the end of today's reading from the Book of Job, chapter 2 and verse 10:

'Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad ? '

The Book of Job addresses a real problem: when bad things happen to good people. I bet if I were to ask any one of you here, then each one of you would know many examples of bad things happening to good folk.

The problem is simply this: how can a good, kind, loving God, our Father in heaven, allow bad things to happen to good people that he knows and cares about if he has the power to prevent such things from happening to them in the first place ?

I guess we all accept that we live in a causal universe. Things happen because there is a reason: it's simply a question of cause and effect. Take illness, for

example: my mum used to say to me as a child: 'Coughs and sneezes spread diseases'. Absolutely – and if you're an intravenous drug user, sharing a dirty needle, then the chances are you'll pick up an infection. If you have unprotected sex with lots of different people, you run the risk of catching a sexually transmitted disease. Drink wine or spirits, beer or cider to excess and you could end up an alcoholic. Smoke cigarettes and you could get lung cancer. Expose yourself to too much sun and you could get skin cancer. The list is endless but the problem comes when a good, clean-living chap, like my friend Greg Webb, dies at a young age when he's lived a good, clean life.

So what has Job to say to us ?

Our text says clearly, unambiguously: 'Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad ?'

Well, the book starts and ends well: Job is blessed with family, friends and enormous wealth. He's a good man, a wise man, a holy man. His faith in God is real and unshakeable. But the book as a whole is the story of bad things happening to a good man and the attempt of his three friends: Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, and a young man called Elihu, to make sense of what is happening in dialogue with Job.

Essentially, they think that Job must have done something bad to have such bad luck and Job is convinced that he hasn't – that, as far as is humanly possible, he's lived the good life. Job wants to talk directly to God, to argue his case face-to-

face, in person, and his wish is granted. It's hard going because the difference between us as humans – even the best of us like Job – and God our creator and redeemer is so great. But, in the end, a repentant and respectful Job is affirmed by God as he says four times of Job to his 'sad' comforters, 'my servant Job'.

So what can we take from the Book of Job ? That being good is no guarantee of having a pain-free, problem free life. God's blessing may not mean that we are protected from the dark side of life. Essentially, the gift of life brings with it both pleasure and pain. Faced with bad things happening to good people, perhaps what Paul writes to the church at Rome may be of help:

'We know that all things work together for the good for those who love God.'

(8 v28)

May that be true for all of us.

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

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G: Sermons 32 : Job

