

Sunday January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022

Job 1:1-5  
“Considering Job”

Have you ever seen on TV, or elsewhere, a celebrity personality who seems to garner a great deal of attention, and you wonder why? What strikes me as odd, are men and women who have never been in a movie, or recorded hit music, or competed at a high level of sports, who garner so much attention. Mind you, there is one group of folks who garner attention for just doing what they do, supposedly, naturally. We call them “reality stars”.

In thinking about this, I began to hear a term batted around more and more, to explain this phenomenon. It seems there is a whole host of people out there who are considered influencers. It was a new concept to me, but it is one we are going to hear more and more over the coming years. So, who are these people, and why should we care? We should care, because the younger generation follows these influencers on mass.

By definition; **An influencer** is someone who has: the power to affect the purchasing decisions of others because of his or her authority, knowledge, position, or relationship with his or her audience. A following in a distinct niche, with whom he or she actively engages. The size of the following depends on the size of his/her topic of said niche audience. It is important to note that these individuals are not merely marketing tools, but rather social relationship assets with which brands can collaborate to achieve their marketing objectives.

**Influencers in social media** are people who have built a reputation for their knowledge and expertise on a specific topic. They make regular posts about that topic on their preferred social media channels, and generate large followings of enthusiastic, engaged people, who pay close attention to their views. Brands love social media influencers, because they can create trends and encourage their followers to buy products they promote.

As a business, influencers are now generating tens of billions of dollars world wide. These are folks your children, and grandchildren, are following; taking advice on all kinds of things, from what to buy, to behavioural decision.

Today is a special day in the spiritual journey of many of us. We are launching a new sermon series on a book of the bible I can't say with confidence I have ever preached on before. As we will see, Job was, in his day, an influencer. If he were alive today, he would be on Tik Tok. His experiences challenged the long-held belief of himself, and his friends, and likely his whole community. I would like to say that as we progress through our little journey, we too will be influenced by Job.

I want to warn you up front of a few important matters. First, the book of Job was written to challenge our beliefs about suffering, and how God relates to said suffering. The book is philosophical, more even than theological. Job is a much-misquoted book, and some of the things we may have heard about this text, are going to have to be jettisoned to get to the truth. I also cannot read verse by verse of every stop on our journey, so I encourage you to read the entirety of the book and dwell on the concepts and ideas you glean for yourselves.

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The book itself, has roughly three sections. The first section, and the last one, is a story in prose. Maybe this is the part of the book you are most familiar with. It is also the section most often used in sermons and studies on “patience”. Which is one of the misapplications of Job’s story. The middle core is poetry, and poetry has to be handled carefully in scripture. Job is part of the section of the bible called wisdom literature which also includes the Psalms, and Proverbs. Rule number one for us is that wisdom literature, needs to be handled very cautiously.

Wisdom literature that is written, or orally transmitted, occurs in all cultures, and it usually is designed to share our experiences with others. However, and this is most critical; wisdom literature should be cautiously quoted, because the situation it refers to is specific to the person sharing it, and not necessarily universal in truth. Let’s see if I can unpack this a bit further.

In our culture we have poetry we quote all the time, from many different sources, to communicate some bit of wisdom to a circumstance. As an example, here is the idiom: “he who hesitates is lost”. It speaks of the need to act immediately before an opportunity is passed. But where does this saying come from, and why do we think it is helpful or truthful? The proverb goes back to 'Cato' by English essayist and poet Joseph Addison. First attested in the United States in 'The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table' by Oliver Wendell Holmes."

What Addison originally wrote, may be true for him when he wrote it, but that doesn’t mean it is true for all of us. It is saying that is at best, generally true, but not always true. In our journey before us, the main issue is suffering. Wisdom says, “you reap what you sow”, but Job’s experience challenges this, because this wisdom is not “always true”.

As a book, Job maybe the oldest portion of scripture, and maybe even all of literature that we possess. Many famous writers like Tenneson, called it the greatest literary work of human kind. I am relying heavily on the fine work of Christopher Ash whose wonderful book *Job: The Wisdom of the Cross*, as it really helped me start to get a handle on this great work of literature.

Job will ask three important question that will rock us to the core. First; what kind of world do we live in? Next, what kind of church should we want? Then finally, what kind of Saviour do we need? There is also before us a critical reality we face in our journey. Shakespeare said, “He jests at scars that never felt pain.” His point is very important. In our journey we can be either arm chair observers, or wheelchair observers.

What I mean is, that we can either sit comfortably from our distant perspective looking at Job’s suffering from our arm chair, or we can recognize in him our own suffering and questions from our wheelchair. The book of Job is not just theological, it is also pastoral. It is an important book for churches and individuals seeking to care for others in their community. The reality is that behind every closed door, on every house, there are hurting individuals wrestling with the same questions Job wrestles with, and we need to wade into the fray with Job to find some truth and solace.

So, lets meet this important man, named Job. Our story begins with “there once was a man”. Job is the story of a human being.

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Although others will be introduced along the way, Job is the central figure in this drama. Its about him first and then it is about us. The story tells us that Job was from “the land of Uz”. Historically no one knows where Uz was. Most scholars think it was a land somewhere east of Israel.

What his location does tells us is our first surprise. Job is not an Israelite. He may have been a Hebrew living outside of the promised land, but we just do not know. The story cannot be accurately dated, because no historical events are listed, but we know its an old story because Job offers sacrifices. Something which would have been unlawful for Israelites to do later on after the priesthood is instituted.

Job lived, therefore, independent of the covenants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Before the captivity in Egypt and before the Exodus. It is therefore important that we not try and understand Job’s culture the way we might understand Genesis or Exodus. Abraham may have been Job’s contemporary but they lived among different people. His name is just his name. There is really no significance to the name.

We also are not given his genealogy, an odd exclusion from middle eastern writings that are biographical. Therefore, we can conclude that Job’s his family history is irrelevant to the story.

There is however one very significant fact about Job that this whole story hangs on. The bible says, “And that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil”. We learn four things emerging in our passage about Job, that reveal his character to us. Job was a man of integrity, that is, he treated others well and fairly. Job was religious, and he was personally moral. Job was “blameless” the bible says. This does not mean perfect, nor does it mean sinless. Job does actually, at one point, mention the “iniquities of his youth”.

The word “blameless” refers to a character of authenticity and genuineness. What you see in Job is what you get. The word blameless means personal integrity not sinless perfection. Centuries later, Timothy had to deal with some men in Ephesus described as the opposite of Job. They gave “the appearance of godliness, but denied its power”. (2 Tim. 3:5) Job will, throughout the book declare his “blameless” nature.

Job also was “upright”. This means that he was someone you could trust to do business with. He would not double-cross you. This leads to his next character trait, and that is he dealt rightly with people and with God. He honoured God. Job wanted to please God with his life, and actions. Then finally, Job’s religion leads to a godly morality. Job, “turned from evil”. To sum up his character then, Job was not a perfect man, but he was genuine in his faith.

His faith directed his life and behaviour. To be clear then, Job was a very, very great man in his neighbourhood, but what is most admirable about him, is his “blameless” character, not what his has. And he has considerable wealth. This point is driven home by listing his assets. Assets which will be critical in our next visit to Job. Job is said to have 7 sons, 3 daughters, 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys and many, many servants. I assume he also had male donkeys but they are not mentioned.

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This list tells us many things about Job. First, he was a farmer. He was not a nomad moving around, but was settle in one place. This made him a recognizable figure at the city gates. Job was a very prominent individual. He was like the E.F. Hutton commercials that said when E.F. Hutton spoke, everyone listened. Job would be a man others would consult, and garner advice on; everything from religion to business.

The list of assets also tells us that Job's wealth was enormous. He was what we call now, "uber rich", with vast holdings and a large payroll. He is described as "the greatest of all the people of the east". As we will see, Job's station in life was believed, even by Job at the beginning, to be a direct result of his "blameless" living. Job and later his friends, believed he had achieved this situation by living a good life. Job did, however, have one major anxiety that we are told about.

We are told that his sons took turns holding a family feast on their birthdays, and maybe it took a few days for this celebration to transpire. There is no mentioned of parties for his daughters though. However, every time there was a party, Job got worried. He was afraid that in their revelry, his family could have angered, or sinned against God. So, as each birthday party comes to an end, Job anxious to please God, rises early, and makes a sacrifice for any sins that may have occurred during the parties.

Job even said of this activity, "It may be that my children have sinned, and curse God in their hearts". Job therefore knows that the appearance of godliness is not as important as a godly heart. He knows that only sacrifices cover the sins of himself and his family. This is the first of many foreshadows in the book of Job, of the ultimate sacrifice made to cover all our sins. Namely our Lord and Saviour Jesus.

So, this is Job, albeit, a brief portrait. Nothing has yet happened. It is a picture of the world as we might think the world should be. "You reap what you sow". From these few verses you can get a sense that there is a "prosperity gospel" at work here. There is however, a dark shadow moving into the story. Is Job really "blameless"? Is his religious devotion really a product of his heart, or to ensure the prosperity he has, will continue?

At its heart, the book of Job is a monumental struggle over any and all ideas of a prosperity gospel, or winning favours from God. I found something in an old Christianity Today issue from September 20, 2017. It is a frank admission from a pastor named Costi Hinn. You have likely never heard of him, but likely have heard of his uncle; Benny Hinn. A TV preacher who gathers a huge following, promising miracles and material goods for those who turn to Jesus.

Benny Hinn and his ministry associates, which are mostly family members, have done very nicely for themselves. Costi says, "Growing up in the Hinn family empire was like belonging to some hybrid of the royal family and the mafia. Our lifestyle was lavish, our loyalty was enforced, and our version of the gospel was big business. Though Jesus Christ was still a part of our gospel, he was more of a magic genie than the King of Kings.

Rubbing him the right way—by giving money and having enough faith—would unlock your spiritual inheritance. God's goal was not his glory, but our gain. His grace was not to set us free from sin but to make us rich. The abundant life he offered wasn't eternal, it was now.

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We lived the prosperity gospel.” And the Hinn family are not alone in this. I once attended a seminar on building wealth at a CBOQ event. The presenter, was not at all bashful about encouraging us to accumulate, because that was God’s will for us. This despite the millions of very genuine believers, worldwide, who are living in poverty. The desire to treat God as a sort of cosmic vending machine is alive and well. Maybe in some of the hearts gathered here today. It is what The Satan thought was the motivation for Job’s religious devotion.

This little portrait of Job, reveals exactly what we will see challenged in our next instalment of our series. Job will now run smack dab into the greatest crisis of his life, and we have a front row seat. All the way along, we will confront powerful questions and philosophical positions that define our own struggles. Job’s story forces us to see that if we believe God is good, then we have a problem because of suffering.

If we believe God is almighty, then we have a problem because suffering happens. The other option, which many people have adopted today, is that if I do not believe God is good or almighty, then I cannot claim I have a problem. So, are you going to join me in this struggle? Not from your armchair, but from your wheelchair. Because it will not be an easy one to traverse.