



Roanoke, Virginia

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“Chaos, Passion, and Pause”

Job 42:1-6, 10-17

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This will be the second sermon in a row based on a passage from Job. I'd call it a two-part sermon series but this wasn't planned. Who would have guessed that on Preschool Sunday, Rev. Brannan would preach on Job? (Good sermon, by the way).

Ben got by with it because he didn't focus on Job's misery. Though I'll talk about Job's misery, I won't focus on his misery either. My focus will be on passion.

I think most of you know the basic plot, but here's a quick recap.

Job is a good man living a good life... until it all comes apart. For seemingly no good reason, he loses his possessions, his children, his health. This past Wednesday in our *Bible in Black and White* class, Bill Lee talked about faith showing itself as joy. Job's story reminds us that it doesn't always work out that way. Job doesn't lose his faith, but he definitely loses his joy.

How Job's life becomes chaos is told in two chapters of prose. Then, for 39 chapters, there come conversations..., all poetry, and all passionate. The conversations include Job talking to himself, then with friends, and then with God.

There is a final chapter of prose that tells of calm following the storm. We are informed that Job and his wife are given more children with his fortune restored.

I will read from that chapter.

¹Then Job answered the LORD: ²"I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. ³"Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. ⁴Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me.' ⁵I had heard of you by the hearing



of the ear, but now my eye sees you; ⁶therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

¹⁰And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends; and the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. ¹¹Then there came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and they ate bread with him in his house; they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him; and each of them gave him a piece of money and a gold ring. ¹²The LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; and he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand donkeys. ¹³He also had seven sons and three daughters. ¹⁴He named the first Jemimah, the second Keziah, and the third Kerenhappuch. ¹⁵In all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters; and their father gave them an inheritance along with their brothers. ¹⁶After this Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his children, and his children's children, four generations. ¹⁷And Job died, old and full of days.

Passion is often praised, and rightly so. We've been told that it is not healthy to repress one's feelings. Not always true, but there is truth to it. It is not helpful or healthy to completely suppress feelings. Bottled-up feelings can lead to anxiety, stress..., even problems with one's physical health. Just this morning I heard that reports of irritable bowel syndrome go up right before presidential elections. There is some dishonesty that comes with repressed feelings when family and friends don't know how you really feel... made worse when they have to bear the brunt of passive-aggressive behavior or terrible outbursts when the capped volcano finally explodes.

Passions are strong human emotions and they can play a positive role.

- Commitment keeps a marriage going but many marriages began with two people being strongly attracted to each other.
 - Oh, let's go ahead and express it in a passionate way and say that they "fell madly in love."
- Great artists- dancers, painters, actors, writers- got to be great because they were passionate about their art.
- People who are passionate about justice confront injustice.
- Passion can be a part of powerful experiences of prayer and worship.

I don't need to keep giving examples, do I? Passion has its value. It has its place.

But there is some truth to that old expression, "blinded by passion." Just this past week I heard these three stories on social media and podcasts.

- I heard a divorcee wonder how she could have married a toxic and unfaithful man in the first place. She said, "[I was so passionate about him that even his flaws made me fall more in love.](#)"
- I heard Tom Brady tell of speaking in a friendly way to the fearsome defensive tackle on the other team, Ndamukong, Suh, hoping to get on his good side so that maybe Suh wouldn't be



so violent with his hits. Suh snapped back, “Don’t be talking to me like I’m your friend. We ain’t friends.” Suh’s passion was hitting, and he didn’t want to see Tom Brady as anything but a guy to hit.

- And I heard an inmate talk about how his life turned from being a college student with a football scholarship to serving a life sentence without parole all because of one fit of rage that led to another’s death.

Passion’s power is that it can focus an emotion. Its danger is that it can be blinding.

The passionate poetry of Job illustrates what I mean. The poetry of the conversations is an example of powerfully focused emotions.

Before Job’s life descends into chaos, he and his friends share a passion. It is a passion for a certain way of seeing the world- a passion for a theology that explains how to live in a world with God in it. For the same of this sermon, I’m going to be overly simplistic and say that their theology is a sort of Prosperity-Gospel. We have this bargain with God.

- Your end of the bargain: worship God, follow God’s Law, be a good person.
- God’s end of the bargain: you’ll be blessed.

Don’t keep your end of the bargain? Well, that’s when bad things happen.

So, let’s get to the conversation that Job has with his friends; Bildad, Zophar and Eliphaz after calamity hits. The friends are so passionate about defending their point of view that they become blind to their friend, Job. Chapter after chapter, they press their case, insisting that Job must have done something wrong to deserve what happened to him. Bildad puts it this way: “**God will not reject a blameless person nor take the hand of evildoers.**”¹ What he implies is, “**So, what did you do?**” They urge Job to do a forensic analysis of his life- and later when that doesn’t work, a forensic analysis of the life of his ancestors- so as to find sins that would explain why Job’s children are in their graves and the boils are on his body. Surely there was something that he or his ancestors did- if not through actions than through the evil intent of the heart.

But Job has already done that forensic analysis. He has searched his history. Of course, he hasn’t been perfect, but he knows- the whole community knows- that he hasn’t done anything to deserve this. Or, *and I’m sure his friends don’t like hearing this-* if he deserves this level of misery, everyone deserves this level of misery: priests and prophets, Father Moses, Mother Theresa and three people named Bildad, Zophar and Eliphaz.

Have I made those friends sound terrible? They’re not terrible, they’re just carried away. Haven’t all of us regretted things we have said in an argument, a debate, a defense of some candidate or cause we believe in? You might mean it when you say it, but only because your passion is so focused you forget who you’re talking to.

¹ Job 8:20.



Anyway, even if you want to give up on Job's friends, Job doesn't. You heard at the end of Job, that Job prays for his friends. But Job tries to stop them from seeing him for who *they need him to be* by reminding them

- how he never swerved from the truth,
- how he upheld the cause of justice,
- how he was the widow's protector,
- how he was eyes for the blind and feet for the lame,
- and how he championed the cause of the foreigner in their midst².

Like many passionate arguments about politics, religion, and whose fault it is, this conversation with friends *goes on and on, chapter after chapter*, and doesn't settle anything. You can see Job tiring of trying to get his friends to see him. From chapter 31 when Job argues with his friends, he really is arguing with God. Job wants a hearing! "Oh, that I knew where to find God," he shouts, "that I might come even to his dwelling! I would lay my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments."³ He wants God to explain God's self- specifically why God did not live up to God's end of the bargain.

Then God finally responds. And the way God responds is an amazing metaphor. God responds out of the calm center of a chaotic whirlwind. In the middle of the storm of chaos, in the stillness of its eye, there is a pause.

What a gift a pause can be in the middle of chaotic conversations. Yes, sometimes you need to be honest with your emotions so they don't fester. That's right. That's right. That's right. But it is also right that sometimes emotion needs to take a pause. Gain some perspective before saying or doing those things you later regret. That inmate I told you about- the one serving a life sentence because of a fit of passion? He would love to have had a pause.

What the pause can give you is perspective.

- Not answers.
- Not explanations.
- Not resolution.

Perspective.

God takes Job out of the debate and on a tour of creation showing him its many wonders. Showing him its amazing beauty despite the suffering it contains.

- Hail can destroy crops?
 - Hey, Job, let me show you where all that hail is stored. It's enormous!
- Lightening that can start a fire?
 - Let me show you the massive battery where I store the lightning (I added the word "battery" in case you're wondering).

² Job 29:13-17.

³ Job 23:3-4)



- Oh, and Leviathan, that great beast of the sea that everyone is so terrified of
 - Let me give you a closeup look so you can see its armor, its teeth, the fire that comes of its nostrils? It is something else.
- Hey Job, this might cheer you up.
 - Let me show you an ostrich that can run faster than almost anything that can eat it but when it is threatened, it puts its head in the ground.
- Let me show you life beginning and life ending. Life, health; so fragile, so beautiful.

The poetry is beautiful. Misery needs the poetry of lament because it cannot be explained so much as expressed. The same with awe. How can you explain a world

- where bad things happen but life is good,
- where suffering and death are part of life worth living,
- where in the end God's presence is more needed than God's explanations.

I love this book so much.

But I need to get back to my point, I guess. Passion is part of why life is so beautiful.

Passion can

- lift us up,
- drive us to achieve,
- draw us to others.

Passion, after all, is what drives Job's friends to visit him.

Passion is what drives Job to defend himself.

Passion is what drives him to open his heart to God,
even though his heart is full of hurt, betrayal and accusation.

But as is true with all things, passion on its own can be dangerous. Passion for how the world *is supposed to be* so distorts the friends' view they lose sight of Job and see only how they need Job to be for their worldview to make sense. And Job's passion for how things are supposed to work distorts his view of God because he only sees the God he needs God to be for *his* worldview to work.

Passion needs pause. There is no pause between Job and the friends, but between Job and God, there is. And found in that pause is perspective.

In case I've become too lofty in my rhetoric, let me tell you a story I heard from a talk Mary Zahn gave that you can hear as a Talkingbird podcast. Mary spoke of longtime friends of hers who are married. They were married so long that they recently celebrated their golden anniversary. But, somewhere within those 5 decades, there were 12 years when the marriage was not strong. Mary was such a good friend of the couple that they told her all about it. There was a lot of blaming,



score keeping, resentments that were only growing stronger. Conversations too easily became arguments, so often they would not talk at all. Divorce was discussed. But, they decided that before they went that far, they should give counseling a try.

That counselor didn't provide them answers or settle their scores. If she provided explanations, the couple can't remember what they were. What the counselor did was learn to pause. She asked them to do something every evening, and they agreed. Each evening they needed to tell each other where they were in regards to four emotions: happiness, fear, anger and pain. And to my point about poetry, because they were both musicians and singers, she asked them to sing a simple folk song together to end the conversation.

Think about that part about talking where they were in relation to happiness, fear, anger and pain. Isn't that interesting? What a nice balance between being honest with your emotions but taking a pause so as to get some perspective on them. They were given space to listen to each other... maybe hear not only where they were in relation to each other but in relation to what else was going on in their lives and world. As with God and Job, helped them be with each other. Not all troubled relationships have happy endings, this one did, and the pause helped make it so.

Job's story has a happy ending of sorts... though you have to know that a life can't be all rosy for someone who has lost so much. But I want you to notice something about how it is with Job who could not see past how life is supposed to be. I want you to notice a perspective the pause gifted him.

In the beginning of the book of Job, Job's sons are named and when Job loses everything, it is his sons' inheritance that is lost. This is before his sons and daughters die in a terrible accident. That only sons are named and only sons get inheritances is not unusual for Job's day. It is a patriarchal culture and that's how it is supposed to be.

But at the end of the story, there are details that let you know that Job can now see past how it is supposed to be. He and his wife have 10 more children. In what you heard as I read our passage, the seven boys are not named but the three girls are. They are the most beautiful women in Israel in Job's eyes And, we are told, they are given an inheritance equal to their brothers.

Wow, look what came of perspective gained in a pause. Given a wider, better, view of God... Job has a wider, better view in the world where he now can see his daughters as equal to his sons.

- Keep in prayer those relationships that are troubled
 - or will be troubled because of focused, blinding, passion.
- Keep in prayer those who are so caught up in some worldview that they can only see what is wrong about the people they oppose and have convinced themselves they should hate them.
- Keep in prayer anyone who has been so captured by misery that they lost perspective and lose hope.
- Keep in prayer yourself for those times when passion needs a pause.



And when you pray, ask for what pause can bring if God is in it: renewed presence and fresh perspective.

