

**Fil-Am Community Church**

**Pastor Rolly Estabillo**

**SERMON 4: THE QUESTION**

**Text: Job 1-2, 4**

You don't have to live very long on this earth to learn that **bad things** happen, and they don't just happen to bad people. They happen to all of us—the good, the bad, and the ugly. Just last week, we learned about the death of a technological genius, Steve Jobs, who invented the iPod, the iPhone, and the iPad not to mention the Mac, the eMac, the iMac and the Macbook. He finally succumbed to pancreatic cancer after years of fighting it.

Then, in the Philippines, people are still reeling from the effects of a typhoon which has devastated thousands, if not millions of people, displacing them, ruining their crops and livelihood. In one province for example, in Bulacan, flooding is so much so that it is still knee-deep even after three weeks. People are bathing in the dirty water, even using it to cook rice. And the TV reported that a young child died after being bitten by a cobra while she was wading in the water.

How about the earthquakes, the hurricanes, the tsunamis that visit us and people around the world? The crimes we see on TV and hear about on the radio, and read on the newspaper and internet?

How can these things happen? Children are abused. Businesses collapse. Homes are destroyed. People are killed. **If God is really good and all-powerful, why does He allow so much pain and evil in the world?**

That is the question that puzzles most people. The question that turns away many people from God. Like the guy that sat beside me on the plane sometime in 1991. He was from Atlanta, Georgia and we got to talking until we came to the subject on religion and he said he didn't believe in God. The reason is that there was a powerful cyclone that hit Bangladesh that year and claimed the lives of more than 150,000 people. He said, "If there is a God, why would he allow such great suffering and evil?"

Folks, that is the **question** we will consider today, the latest in a series of studies called *God Quest*. Today, we will focus on the problem of evil and suffering in this world, a problem that plagues and puzzles us all.

To guide us in the discussion, I'll ask you to turn to the **Old Testament book of Job**, found in your Bible right before the Psalms.

The first verses of Job set up the story. It's an ancient story, but it's one I believe God is going to use to teach us some very contemporary truths today. It says:

*In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. He had seven sons and three daughters, and he owned seven thousand sheep, three*

*thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East.*

*His sons used to take turns holding feasts in their homes, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have them purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom. —Job 1:1-5 (NIV)*

Job is described as **blameless** and **upright**. He is depicted as wealthy and accomplished, a family man with a wife, seven sons, and three daughters.

From there, the story turns dark. Look with me at verses 6-12:

*One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it."*

*Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil."*

*"Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But stretch out your hand and strike everything he*

*has, and he will surely curse you to your face.”*

*The LORD said to Satan, “Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.”*

*Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD. —Job 1:6–12 (NIV)*

Now, there’s a lot going on in those verses, and if we took the time, we could be here all day studying all this passage shows us. But we won’t. Instead, I will just focus you on three things these verses show us.

### **1. God does not cause evil.**

Actually, first off, these verses show us something even more fundamental, and that is that **evil exists**. It is personified in the person of **Satan**, the adversary, who shows up in verse 6. That’s an important truth to note.

Before he became a Christian, author C. S. Lewis was a confirmed atheist. We all know who C.S. Lewis is, right? If you don’t maybe you’ve seen the movies he wrote, you know, the “Chronicles of Narnia”? Anyway, he saw all the pain and injustice in the world as evidence *against* God. He looked at the evil and suffering in the world and concluded there couldn’t be a God who is both good and all-powerful. But then, he said, that argument “threw me back into another difficulty”:

*My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I*

*comparing this universe with when I called it unjust? (C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, 38).*

Lewis not only wrote fantasy novels but he is an apologist and wrote books defending the Christian faith. Lewis realized, of course, that calling something evil is only possible if there exists a standard of good and evil that is objective and universal. That standard, of course, is the **goodness of God**. Just as crookedness is a departure from that which is straight, so evil is a transgression against the goodness of God. And that reality is clearly shown to us in this ancient book of Job.

The author of this book shows us a heavenly scene in which Satan, the evil one, the fallen angel who rebelled against God, appears before God's throne to impugn Job's righteousness. And notice carefully what happens in that exchange. Satan says to God, "*Stretch out your hand and strike everything [Job] has, and he will surely curse you to your face.*"

But God doesn't agree to that. He says, "*Everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.*" Here, right in the beginning of this 3,500-year-old book, we are shown that God does not cause evil.

We live in a fallen world. The first chapters of the Bible show us that everything God created was good, until the serpent—and his human dupes—got hold of it. And so it is now, today, in our lifetimes. **There is evil in this world, but it does not come from God—never has.** There is

suffering in this world, but that was not part of God’s plan in the beginning, and it is not in His plan for the conclusion.

But there’s more to discover in this fascinating story. Look what happens next, from chapter 1, verse 13, to the end of the chapter. First, Job learns, in wave after wave of bad news, that his herds, his flocks, and his servants—his wealth, his livelihood—have been destroyed. As if that wasn’t bad enough, he learns soon after that his sons and daughters were tragically killed—a loss no parent should ever have to face.

Even then, Satan was not finished. In the next chapter, verse 3 says:

*Then the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason.”*  
*“Skin for skin!” Satan replied. “A man will give all he has for his own life. But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face.”*  
*The LORD said to Satan, “Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life.”—Job 2:3–6 (NIV)*

Those verses lead to the next discovery:

## **2. My perspective is limited.**

As the heavenly drama unfolds between Satan and God—Satan coming and going, God on the throne, Satan taunts, God places limits on Satan’s

activity—Job, who is the central figure in the story, knows nothing about it. He hears nothing of this. He sees nothing. He knows only the earthly fallout of the heavenly battle. Job has no idea of the part he is playing in a cosmic contest! He has no concept of what Satan is up to ... or what God is up to. He simply knows that evil has befallen him, that he is hurting badly, and that the lights of heaven have seemingly gone out.

And our situation—**your situation**—is much like Job's. Some of us are suffering right now. Some of us are going through unimaginable trials. Some of us are not sure we're gonna make it ... or that our faith will.

And I could spout all sorts of platitudes for you ... but platitudes don't cut it when a soul is suffering. In fact, explanations and justifications will always ring hollow in the face of evil and suffering. Which may be why the book of Job doesn't offer any. It simply shows us that **our perspective is limited**.

*None of us can know why so-and-so gets cancer ... because our perspective is limited. None of us can explain why children suffer ... because our perspective is limited. None of us can understand why tornadoes and earthquakes and tsunamis and floods strike when they do, where they do, as often as they do ... because our **perspective is limited**.*

God, here in His Word, doesn't even pull back the curtain of heaven to show us why ... He does it to show us that our perspective is too limited to fully

understand the why. It's not a very satisfying answer, I know. But it's a truthful one, a biblical one.

Which leads us to the truth that

### 3. God is at work.

After chapter 2 in the book of Job ends, the next thirty-five chapters are filled with the opinions and philosophies of men, trying to answer the question, Why is Job suffering? It's some of the finest poetry—and lousiest philosophy—in history! Because ... our perspective, as humans, is limited.

Then, in chapter 38, God speaks. And guess what? He never gives Job one word of explanation. Not ... one ... word. But what God does, in those final chapters of Job, is to establish the fact that, while Job felt like life was spinning out of control, God never did. **God never lost control.** He was never worried. He was never flustered. And He was always at work.

Let me call Kuya Rey as he gives his testimony.

“I was a Catholic when I was growing up and then became a Mormon way back in 1986. It was on Dec 1998 when I accepted the Lord to be my savior. Like a new Christian I thought everything will go on smoothly after the acceptance, but what I learned is that you're not exempted even if you are Christian or not. You will still be experiencing hurt, pain, rejection, failures, disappointments, and sickness. You see, two months before I became a

Christian, in Oct. 1998, I was diagnosed with a stage C-3 "Colon Cancer". When I became a Christian, I was hoping for a miracle but God did not heal me instantly. I asked questions like "Why me?" "I'm now a Christian, why am I still sick?" And the hard part is the kids were still young, Joseph was only 2 years old and David was about 5 months old. But you know what, after several weeks of struggling with the pain and my doubts and questions, I Did not feel like I was going to die, but instead I was looking forward to surviving the Cancer in my body. And I know and believe that the Lord our God is the One who put that peace and confidence in me, that everything was going to be all right. You know HE promises us that He will not leave us nor forsake us, and that His mercies are new every morning. God is always working behind the scenes, He will always bring you the right person that will play a great role in your life. And just last year it was my wife Rose who was diagnosed with Uterian Cancer. Rose herself started to ask questions. She wondered why it happened to her when she was faithful to God. But once again the Lord showed His never ending mercies to my family. He is our great healer. I believe He always has a special purpose for our lives. My prayer is that the Lord will continue to guide me and strenghten me as we we go on our journey here on earth. He always promises us blessings as long as we live in righteousness and obedience to His word.

May we continue to choose to love and serve Him all the days of our life and live in that life of abundance and victory He has in store for us."

As you've heard from Kuya Rey, even in the darkest moments, God never deserted him and his wife the way he never deserted Job. His presence brings joy and purpose and strength even in the midst of our toughest times. And many who have suffered most deeply would say they wouldn't trade their suffering for anything in the world, because it was there—in the darkness—that God did some of His best work in their lives.

And so I think it was with Job.

The book ends like this, in chapter 42:

*The LORD blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the first. He had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand donkeys. And he also had seven sons and three daughters. ... Nowhere in all the land were there found women as beautiful as Job's daughters, and their father granted them an inheritance along with their brothers.*

*After this, Job lived a hundred and forty years; he saw his children and their children to the fourth generation. And so Job died, old and full of years. —Job 42:12-13, 15-17 (NIV)*

Now, not everyone's suffering ends so completely, so happily ... on this earth anyway. But everyone's suffering ends. And someday, God promises, so will evil. And while we may often get impatient in the meantime, the Bible says that God is at work ... all the time ... and His

purpose is far more, far greater, than making our lives happy and easy ... or even making our lives livable.

His purpose is bringing about His glory and leading us all into His kingdom, ultimately into a new heaven and a new earth that will so far surpass this one that it will make Job's latter prosperity look like poverty.

Let us pray.....