



## **THE NOBLEST OF CHARACTERS**

2016 saw the passing of arguably the unluckiest person in recorded history – a Croatian named Frano Selak. Over the course of his life, Selak survived a train derailment into a river, a plane accident in which he fell out of a door onto a haystack, a coach crash, 2 car fires, being struck by a bus in Zagreb, and a head-on collision with a UN truck on a mountain pass. (Mind you, he did manage to win almost 1 million euros in the Croatian national lottery 2 days after his 73<sup>rd</sup> birthday, so it wasn't all bad.)

Now some might call that extreme misfortune. But it's still nothing compared to Job! And there's a reason for that.

Job is a thought-experiment, a book of extremes. Job's righteousness is extreme. His suffering is extreme. The speeches are extreme! And it's all intended to pose this question: "So, you think you understand why God allows suffering, do you? Well, what about *this* scenario ...?"

Yes, Job is a book of extremes. And in today's part of the story, those extremes get whacked up to 11:

### **Job 29:1-17; 30:1-2, 9-31; 31:1-8, 29-40**

We're in the centre of the book, and a speech from Job himself. In the first half, he talked about what it means to be a wise person. In the second half, he lurches from a positive place back to a negative one. And in the process, he describes what it means to be a godly person:

**1) The person he was when things were good** (ch29). Job begins to reminisce, to long for what he used to have:

- A good relationship with God (newsflash: he still has).
- A good relationship with his kids.
- A good relationship with the wealthy.
- A good relationship with the poor.

Job was respected, by everyone. Why? Because he cared. Cared about God. Cared about his family. Cared about his community. And because of that, he made a positive difference; living out the *Torah* before it was even given!

Now some people have looked at this and used it against him: "Aha!" they say. "That's why Job is going through this! Because secretly he is proud of himself, and God has to bring him down a peg or two." Except ... this is the first time, in 28 chapters, that Job has made any mention of the life that he's led. He's been accused time and again, pleaded his innocence, but only now does he defend himself. I think I might have done it before now! Wouldn't you?

No, this is a part of the lesson of Job. That you can be as good as it's possible to be ... and still suffer. But it's also saying this: he was a considerate man when he didn't have to be.

I.e. Job was a godly man.

**2) The person he is when things are bad** (ch30). The next point begins with a 'but' and a significant shift in tone. Because now, everything's changed.

- **Socially.** Young men mock him, men whose fathers were so unsavoury he would have kept his sheepdogs away from them! They make up songs about him, they ostracise him, the closest they get to him is a spitting-distance. God has 'unstrung his bow', taken away Job's defences, and laid him open to attack.
- **Medically.** His life is ebbing away: his days and nights full of suffering and pain. Later, he describes his skin as bruising and peeling away, and his body burning with fever. If he were a musical instrument, he'd be playing a minor chord or a song that makes you want to cry (think Coldplay's early stuff).
- **Spiritually.** No matter how much Job prays, God seems to be ignoring him. Scrub that: seems to be attacking him. He's like a leaf blown in the wind, and he's convinced that God is about to kill him. And Job is confused: despite all he has done for others, when his own suffering comes, no-one wants to help.

What does this tell us about Job? Well, for starters, he's still crying out to God (vs20-23)! But also this: if you're going to be treated badly, make sure it's because you've done nothing to deserve it. Or better still ... that you've done what is right (1 Peter 4:12-16).

I.e. Job is *still* a godly man.

**3) The person he would be if *he* were bad** (ch31). The last bit of Job's defence is an almost sci-fi argument: "In an alternative universe, this is how I would behave ..."

- "In a world where I could build a harem, I would still stick with the woman I made a covenant with."
- "If I have deceived or cheated others, then let others eat what I have sown, and all my crops be lost."
- "If I have cheated with another man's wife, then let my own wife be given to another (in levirate marriage)."
- "If I have treated my menservants and maidservants unfairly, may God confront me and call me to account."
- "If I have ignored the cries of the poor and refused to share my wealth, may I lose the strength of my arm."
- "If I have made an idol of gold and possessions, or sun and moon, may God regard me as unfaithful."
- "If I have gloated, refused hospitality, or covered my sin as Adam, for fear of what others might think ..."
- "If even the land cries out against me on behalf of my tenants, may I be left with briars and weeds."

And just before that final point, he says this: "I sign now my defence", or literally, 'Here is *tavi* (my *tav*).' The final letter in the Hebrew alphabet, it's used here as a seal, a signature. Job's not just willing to sign his name to his past or his present; he'd be willing to accept whatever punishment he might deserve in an alternative timeline!

Now that doesn't make him perfect (which is why we all need Jesus – even Job!). But it does make him *godly*.

### **Cue: Slapstick Moment**

"All the world's a stage," Shakespeare once said, "and all the men and women merely Players." Imagine you're an actor in a silent movie, and your part is to slip on the floor or get a plank to the head (some of you might say, "Steve, that's the story of my life, right there"). You might not like that role. But the Director needs you to play it.

What matters most in life is that you are the best silent movie actor / human being you can be. That you realise that every moment – good times, bad times, even hypothetical times – are an opportunity to 1) be wise, and 2) be godly.

Because to God, that is what matters, most.