

My Servant Job. My Servant Jesus.

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Lent #1 Job Series

Job 1:1 – 2:10

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Dearest children of God,

Whenever people go through hardships, questions arise. And when we go through trials as Christians who believe in a sovereign God, then we have questions about God, questions for God. Sometimes those questions come out of anger: God, why did my loved one have to die so young? Sometimes we might be more introspective and say, God, what do you want me to learn in this valley? Or we might wonder, God, what purpose are you accomplishing through my struggle? Those are just a few questions. I'm sure there are many others.

For those of us who know the story of Job, we know there are more questions than answers. And that's very often true for *our* lives too—more questions than answers. Over the coming weeks of Lent as we return to this book, Pastor Michael and I will help us face some of the questions. We might not get all the answers we sometimes look for but I pray that we will get a clearer picture of our Lord Jesus and his involvement in our lives. And the difference that makes.

To get oriented to the book, let's start by looking at Job.

Who is Job?

We don't get a lot of background information but what we do read is important. Job 1:1 tells us,

Job 1:1 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.

I had a lot of information I wanted to share about Uz but there's not enough time for that. In short, Uz was almost certainly a town outside of Israel to the southeast. In fact, v.3 says Job was from the East. Perhaps Job is shown to be from outside of Israel proper so that people of all nations can better identify with him, whether Israelites or their neighbours or you and me. His story is ours in some way.

Regardless of Job's home town, we learn that Job is a worshipper of Yahweh, which is God's covenant name in the Old Testament. Yes, Job worshipped God and shunned evil. By Jewish definitions and by that of most people, Job would be called a good man. His uprightness is exemplified in vv.4-6 where Job acts as a priest in his family. He offers sacrifices and prayers to atone for the possible sins of his children who had been out celebrating. To me, then, Job shows the Jews of old—and people of all generations and places—a beautiful picture of a God-fearing man who is also a godly father interceding for his family.

Digging in a bit more, the writer goes to great lengths to show us Job's character. He is described as "blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil." (v.1). *Blameless* could suggest sinless, but that's not the meaning. It's better to understand that the author is painting a picture of Job as a man of *integrity*. Job had a good and

positive reputation among his peers. People knew that Job lived by certain principles and he didn't waver from them. That's integrity.

For the last two weeks the news has been filled with reactions to testimony of the former Attorney General, Jody Wilson-Raybould. As she spoke before the Commons Ethics Committee which is trying to figure out if other government agencies were trying to influence her decisions, she spoke with a deep sense of righteousness. She said, "I was taught to always be careful what you say because you cannot take it back. I was taught to always hold true to your core values and principles and to act with integrity. These are the teachings of my parents, my grandparents and my community. I come from a long line of matriarchs and I am a truth teller in accordance with the laws and traditions of our big house. This is who I am and this is who I always will be." That statement speaks to her desire to be a person of integrity and to be known as such.

In a similar way, Job had a solid moral direction for his life. It doesn't mean he was sinless. But you could say that Job was someone all people should aspire to be like. God himself said in chapter 1:8 and repeated in chapter 2:3,

Job 1:8 There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.

That integrity seems to come from his devotion to Jahweh. We see Job's strong desire to faithfully worship and serve the LORD, which translates into living by a certain set of principles from Jahweh. His personal life yielded fruit from God. As he chased after God's desires, God blessed him.

I think it was NT Wright who wrote, "Job is a very big deal indeed. He is the ...Bill Gates or John D. Rockefeller of Uz. He would need those seven sons to help him run his estate; he would need the three daughters to help him cope with the social life that would issue from his responsibilities; and he would need a huge staff to oversee his operation."

All of that is true. However, we need to steer away from a health and wealth understanding of this man. The Bible does **not** teach that everyone who follows the Lord faithfully will be blessed with health and wealth. But health and wealth are two examples of how God can bless us as we follow his prescriptions for life. But that's not a guarantee.

That's the thing about wisdom literature in the Bible which includes the book of Job. People often confuse statements in wisdom literature with promises from God. And that's where we get into trouble. People read that Job was upright and that he had a large family and lots of money. They say that he was blessed like that because he loved God so much. They say that this is God's promise.

Wisdom literature, however, says this is how things often and even normally go. If you live by God's statutes, you end up staying out of the pits of immorality that can lead to all kinds of self-inflicted hardship; you stay in the area where God's blessings come to you. And that's a good place to live but that's not a guarantee of health and wealth. Blessings come in many different forms. Poor or unhealthy people can have peace and spiritual strength which are also blessings.

If the story of Job is intended to teach us that no trouble will come to us if we walk in uprightness, then it falls apart very quickly when we get to the middle of chapter 1. Despite his integrity, Job loses almost everything: his children, his herds and then his health. All of his health and wealth are stripped away almost instantly. And we find Job sitting in ashes and scraping his wounds with broken pottery. He's gone from riches to poverty and sorrow.

That's what makes this book so hard to figure out. Job is a good guy. God even said so twice. We'd all like to think that if we live a good Christian life, we will never have to face trouble. That was the thinking of Job's friends who show up in the middle of chapter 2. And wouldn't that be nice if we just had to live by God's designs and then we'd never have to face another problem!!? Indeed.

The Problem of Job

That's the problem with the book of Job. If Job had some clear moral flaws we could point to, then we could say, "Ah ha! That's the reason things fell apart in his life!" That was the easy answer for Job's friends. And it's often what we think as well. If I'm suffering, it must be because I did something wrong. But God had already declared twice that there was no one on earth as good as Job! So Job's moral failure is not the reason for his suffering. He's innocent.

So then what is the reason?

The book of Job raises some questions as we search for an answer. We see God and Satan having a discussion. That raises questions for Stan Mast, a now retired CRC pastor. He says, "Why was God talking to Satan at all? Does the scene portrayed here happen all the time? Does God make bets with the Devil? Why would God test Job, since God presumably already knew what Job would do? The story seems to say that God wanted to prove to Satan that Job will be unfailingly righteous. But who cares what Satan thinks? He is a devil, a liar and a murderer. Why didn't God just tell Satan to shut up and go back to hell where he belongs? Why give in to the devil's taunts? To shut him up? To test Job? Or is it to make a point to the readers of this story throughout history?" Is it a completely different point than what we are looking for?

Go back with me to the text. In both chapter 1 and chapter 2, we see that Satan is called to present himself to the LORD, Yahweh. Look at v.6 in chapter 1.

Job 1:6 One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them.

Isn't that interesting? Satan is a fallen angel but he's still very clearly under God's control and must report to God. As one writer put it, "he is a servant, albeit an unwilling one, who must give an account of himself to his Master (whom he despises)."

So we see that Satan has some freedom and he uses it constantly to try to wreak havoc in God's creation, including people's lives. God is on the throne, ruling the world, but the devil has some limited power and he uses it for immoral ends. He is answerable to God and must even get permission from God. But God in his sovereign power, grace, and wisdom will not be outdone by Satan. Instead, he's promising that all things will work together for the good of those who are his. We don't always like to hear that,

especially when we're in the pits of life, but we can know with certainty that God is strongly in control of the world. He most definitely could, but he does not stop every evil thing from coming our way. All we can know for sure is that nothing comes to us outside of his sovereign love. He's given us his word on that.

Because God is sovereign and rules over everything, people often point a finger back at God for everything that we feel is wrong in the world. But that is an easy out. We ought to be honest about our own role in the brokenness of this world and how it affects us.

Job and his family were affected by natural disasters. The Bible tells us that the whole creation groans under the weight of the sin that we humans brought into this world. The storms that took the lives of Job's children were part of the groans of creation. I find it interesting that our weather forecasters and insurance companies don't usually acknowledge God's good acts but when disasters strike, they are called "Acts of God." God becomes a convenient scapegoat for us sometimes.

The same is true for the evils done by other people—like the Sabeans and Chaldeans who steal Job's livestock. When a gunman shoots up a school and kills innocent children and teachers, people sometimes blame God. "I cannot believe in a God who lets innocent children die." Or when cancer enters our world because greedy corporations pour their poisonous waste into our drinking water, is that God's fault?

Notice, friends, that Satan, the forces of nature and humanity itself bear some blame for the pain and suffering in our world and in our lives. God created all things good. We fell for Satan's temptation. We cast the world into sin and the creation groans because of it. And we give in to our greed, adultery, pride and so much more which leads us to act in ways that can hurt others. These are some of the answers to the problems raised in this story of Job.

The Reality behind the Story

In addition, we do well to recognize that sin so corrupts our view of reality that we start to make God into the bad guy. Notice that Satan did that when he saw Job so faithfully following the Lord. Jahweh looks down on the world and points out to Satan that Job puts a smile on his face every day. This guy from Uz knows that God is good and he wants to follow God's ways. This most certainly pleases the LORD. Satan, however, snidely replies, "Yeah, right. He only follows you because you spoil him. You're buying his love." Or the other way around, Satan says that Job only tries to put on a good show for God because he's buying God's favour. "As long as he does good things that please God, God keeps blessing him." That's the health and wealth spin. Either way, Satan says, "Take away all of the blessings and Job will curse God! Right now, Job is in this for his own benefit. It's skin for skin," say Satan! "Job takes care of God and God takes care of Job. They benefit each other. Let Job feel some pain and he'll turn from God faster than a speeding bullet."

What Satan discovers after God allows him to take away everything dear to Job is that Job still trusts God. As Mast comments, "Even after he loses everything and writhes in unbearable physical pain and is urged by his wife to give up on his moral and spiritual

integrity and curse God, Job will not let go. Contrary to his wife whom he accuses of speaking like a fool, Job demonstrates the heart of biblical wisdom by expressing his ‘fear of the Lord.’ Still centered on God, he says, ‘Shall we receive good from God, and not trouble?’ And, says the writer, ‘In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.’ Satan failed. God won. Job does not serve God for selfish purposes.”

C.J. Williams wrote a book called The Shadow of the Cross in the Sufferings of Job. He says the book of Job is not trying to answer the sorts of questions we raise when we think about human suffering and God. Instead, he says, “The basic question of Job is: what will God do to curtail the power of Satan and subdue the Great Adversary who wanders the earth? The ultimate purpose of the trial of Job is to give a divine answer to the rebellious wanderings of Satan.

“That answer comes in the form of a righteous man who endures great suffering, and who is finally exalted and vindicated at last. In addition, dear church, “the trial of Job is a provisional (or temporary) picture of what was to come, meant to give assurance to God’s people, and put Satan on notice.” Does that make sense? We often read Job and say, Why does God let this righteous man suffer? But we are better served by reading it and seeing how God puts Satan on notice. That’s the reality behind this story. God is showing Satan that this adversary will never win the battle for God’s people.

Take-Away Reminders

Let me wrap this up now with a few take-away reminders from this story of Job’s suffering or this story of God’s victory over Satan.

First, sin is real and has real effects on us. It comes in the form of Satan inflicting pain, it comes from natural disasters or powers, and from people who give in to sinful or evil desires. Suffering can come because of our own sin. Bad actions can have bad consequence like when you drive drunk and break your neck in an accident. But sometimes we are just the victim. When children are abused, for example, it’s not their fault whatsoever. But it scars them for life. Sin has real effects.

Secondly, God is sovereign. He is in charge, even of Satan. I know that raises other questions. To be sure, there are chapters to come where Job wrestles with his loss and God’s place in it all. But, in the end, he is able to rest in God’s sovereignty, trusting that God is good and loving in all his words and actions, confessing that the Lord gives and the Lord takes away. And blessing God’s holy name.

Thirdly, we need to live by faith right now. Our lives have not yet reached the end of the story. Satan has been put on notice that his power is limited. And his time is limited.

We’ll see the end of the story in the coming weeks. At this point, it reminds us to live in anticipation of the end of our story too—the restored creation where there is no more pain or sorrow or tears.

Fourthly and finally, keep an eye on Jesus’ work for us. Jesus is anticipated in this story. As Job is God’s good (but not perfect) servant, he points to the Lord Jesus as

God's perfect servant. Through the deal we see God make with Satan, God proves to Satan that Job isn't in it for himself. And by reading the Gospels, we see that "God proves that point about himself on Calvary." He is not into us for himself. Our Lord Jesus sacrificially offers himself, "the righteous for the unrighteous," says 1 Peter 3:18. Why? "to bring us to God." That's powerful truth. That's the guarantee that nothing can separate us from God's love, as Paul says in Romans 8.

Friends, keep an eye on Jesus every day of your life. See that our God walked with us in the person of Jesus. He demonstrated the fullest extent of self-giving love. Jesus our high priest offers himself to suffer and die in our place and to thereby redeem us from our sin. His suffering ensures that our life will end well, despite our troubles on this side of the grave. Our robes are often covered in ashes and tears of sorrow. But when Christ returns we will receive white robes of righteousness and unending joy and eternal peace. He enters our suffering and ensures that it has a redemptive purpose in the sovereign plan of God.

Here's the bottom line: Satan wants us to keep our eyes on him and his demonic power in this world so that we live in fear. God say, "No, look at my servant Jesus. He defeated Satan. He's your great priest. Live in his peace.