

## “Have You Considered My Servant, Job?”

*Texts: Job 1:6-2:10; Revelation 12:1-12*

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The veil between the seen and the unseen has been lifted. The heavenly court is in session. The Lord is on his throne and legions of angels are present. Summoned by God, Satan comes before the court as the accuser of God’s people. But this time it is the Lord who directs Satan’s attention to his righteous servant, Job. Seeing an opportunity to attack the foundation of the gospel, Satan takes up the Lord’s challenge, calling into question Job’s righteousness. According to the Accuser, Job is a hypocrite. Job is blameless and upright, fears God and shuns evil, only because God bribes him to do so by giving Job great wealth and personal comfort. Take all these things away—Satan argues—and Job’s supposed piety will be exposed for what it is—a lie. And so with God’s challenge issued and accepted by Satan, the wisdom and goodness of God is at stake. Job must enter into a trial by ordeal, a trial he must endure and from which he must emerge victorious, so that God’s wisdom will be vindicated and that all his ways—mysterious as they may be—will be proven right.<sup>1</sup>

We now come to that section of Job in which the mysterious purpose underlying Job’s horrific ordeal is revealed—the vindication of God’s wisdom in his dealing with all of his creatures, especially as it relates to the gospel and God’s redemption of sinners. As we will see in Job 1:6-2:10, Job will lose everything he has except his life, his wife and three of his friends. As the scope of the disaster faced by Job becomes fully apparent, the reader begins to realize that Job would be much better off without his wife and friends as well, since his wife behaves like Eve (unwittingly serving the purposes of the Devil) and since his friends only contribute to Job’s suffering through their seemingly wise, but utterly flawed theological counsel.

The story of Job is the classic tale of the suffering of a righteous man. But the account of Job’s trial by ordeal is also given to us by God to reveal something far less obvious, but every bit as important as offering comfort to those who suffer. As the story of Job unfolds, we will see that God’s wisdom is ultimately revealed in a perfectly just and infinitely merciful Savior, whose ways may be mysterious, but which are always proved righteous.<sup>2</sup> Not only does the Book of Job force us to wrestle with the question, “why do the righteous suffer?” but the answer which Job learns through his own suffering is that God is righteous in all his dealings with his creatures and always does what is right, even if this is beyond our understanding.

The awareness of this great truth forces us to bow the knee to that one who created us, who ordained all the circumstances of our lives and the number of our days, and who then sent his own sinless son to save us from the consequences of human sin and finitude. In the story of Job, we not only encounter the mystery of suffering, we also encounter the wisdom of God in the person of Jesus Christ in whom all the mysteries of human existence are fully and finally answered.

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<sup>1</sup> M. G. Kline, *Glory in Our Midst* (Overland Park, KS: Two-Age Press, 2001), p. 100.

<sup>2</sup> Meredith G. Kline, “Job,” in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, edited Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), p. 462

Recall from our introductory sermon, the Book of Job is not a book of apologetics designed to give us an answer to the problem of evil. Rather, the Book of Job is an account of the suffering of a righteous man who had done nothing whatsoever to bring about the horrific trial he was about to endure. In his suffering, Job is not only an example to us of how we should face suffering (should God bring such suffering and loss into our own lives), but the ordeal of Job plays an important role in redemptive history.

The first man, Adam, failed his time of testing in Eden, thereby plunging the entire human race into sin. Once Adam rebelled against God, and the gospel had been declared in Genesis 3:15, Job must endure a time of testing so as to vindicate God's wisdom in dealing with sinners. Job must do this not only to confound Satan's attack upon the gospel, but also to reveal to the human race that through his own suffering and upright conduct, a righteousness is even now being revealed which points us ahead to the perfect and faultless righteousness of the second Adam yet to come. As Job endures the loss of his health and all he owns, God triumphs over Satan's hatred of the gospel and contempt of the human race.<sup>3</sup> As Job endures in the midst of his suffering, we get our first glimpse of how God will fulfill all righteousness and crush the head of the Accuser. In the trial and ordeal of Job, we see what will be required for sinners to be justified—the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ.

That the story of Job is on one level a story about the gospel, can be seen in the opening words of this great book. In Job 1:1 we read that Job was a blameless and upright man, who feared God and who shunned evil. Like Abraham (who lived about the same time), Job believed God's promise to provide a redeemer to take away the guilt of his sins, and was justified through the means of faith and on account of the merits of the coming redeemer, Jesus Christ. But Job's faith in the promised redeemer bore much fruit as seen in Job's life of gratitude to God. So much so that Job's great piety was widely known and admired by all who knew him. Job acted as priest of his family, regularly offering burnt sacrifices on behalf of his seven sons and three daughters, whom he loved very dearly. Job was so pious, the Lord can say about him, there was no one else like him on the earth! A wealthy man, Job owned large numbers of animals and employed many servants. He was considered "the greatest man among all the people of the east." All of this was the fruit of Job's faith in God's promise to save him from his sins.

Before we take up the scene before the heavenly court and the results of the decision issued by that court, we need to keep in mind that the readers of this book know what Job does not. Job does not know about the courtroom scene, nor the challenge to the gospel raised by the Devil. Job has no idea of what is about to befall him. Nor does Job know the reason why a series of horrible things will take place leaving him sick and with nothing. All Job knows after losing everything is that somehow and in some way, God will do what is right and that Job will be vindicated in the end. In this, Job is an example for all of us.

Despite the temptation to dwell on the past and despite the counsel given him by his friends to look back at his life to find the reason why he lost everything—"what did you do that brought all of this to pass?"—instead, Job looks ahead to the future. It is Job who tells us in chapter 19:25: "*I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.*" It is Job, while in the midst of pain and loss beyond our imagination, who points us to the coming redeemer. When his wife tells him to curse God and die, when his friends tell him that he is only getting what he deserved, it is Job, who refuses to blame God and instead praises the name of the Lord. It is the suffering and miserable Job, who is both a type of Christ—the true man of sorrows—as well as a prophet who directs our gaze ahead to that final day when God will indeed turn all our suffering to good.

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<sup>3</sup> Kline, "Job," p. 464.

We now turn to the first part of our text (verses 6-12 of chapter 1), where the divine purpose underlying Job's trial is revealed.

While the first five verses of Job tell us something about the man Job and his particular circumstances, beginning in verse 6 of the opening chapter the scene shifts to the heavenly court which is in session. We read "*one day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them.*" This is one of the few passages in the Bible where the veil is removed from the angelic world, which is otherwise invisible to human eyes. YHWH is seated on his throne, ruling over all and surrounded by the hosts of heaven. The scene is reminiscent of Zechariah chapter 3, when Satan brings charges against Joshua, Israel's high priest.<sup>4</sup>

In Job, Satan is the "Accuser," or more literally, "the Adversary." His appearance before the court most likely means that the Devil is obligated to appear before the heavenly court when summoned by God. It is also clear from what transpires, that Satan cannot touch Job until given permission to do so. God's sovereignty over all things is absolute, including the activities and operations of the Devil. As Luther once put it, "the Devil is God's Devil." That is, Satan cannot do anything which God does not permit him to do. Satan is a creature, bound to submit to God and not in any sense God's equal.

But our situation is quite different from that of Job. Job lived before the coming of Christ and the cross, while we live after Christ crushed Satan's head. As we read in Revelation 12:1-12, with the coming of Jesus Christ, Satan has been cast from the heaven and no longer has access to the heavenly court. In Revelation 12:7-9, we read "*there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down--that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.*" Furthermore, Satan has been bound and confined to the great abyss as depicted in Revelation 20:1-3.

The eviction of Satan from heaven accounts for two important theological facts. First, Satan no longer has access to the throne of God. He can no longer accuse us or bargain with God about our particular circumstances. If we suffer, it is not because the circumstances involved are beyond the control of God, as if the Devil was free to do to us what he wanted. Satan is now a defeated foe, utterly humiliated by the cross. Second, we need to consider that Satan is now cast to earth where he wages a furious war against the church through the propagation of lies and heresies, since Satan is elsewhere called the father of all lies since he was a liar from the beginning (John 8:44). In Revelation 12:12, we read that Satan "*is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.*" Having been defeated, and knowing that his doom is sure, Satan is like a wounded animal, perhaps more dangerous than before. After the cross, his weapons are not lightning, whirlwinds and boils, but heresy and schism in the church. It is Satan who will attempt to trick us into despair by propagating lies about the goodness of God.

As we glimpse the heavenly court described in Job 1:7, we read that "*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.'*" This is but another way of affirming what Peter declares of the Devil in 1 Peter 5:8. "*Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*" The Lord now directs

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<sup>4</sup> Kline, *Glory in Our Midst*, pp. 99-102.

Satan's attention to the man Job, whom one writer describes as a creation of God's redemptive grace.<sup>5</sup> As a fallen son of Adam, Job has been justified by grace through faith and now manifests the fruit of the Spirit. Thus we read in verse 8, "*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.'*"

This remarkable assertion goes beyond the declaration of verse 1. Not only was Job blameless and upright, his piety was so great that "*there was no one else on earth like him.*" This man is the apple of God eye and manifests a faint glimmer of that perfect righteousness we will later see in the life of Jesus Christ. In the similar scene found in Zechariah 3, Satan can find all kinds of sin in Joshua the high priest. In that instance, God's response is to strip off Joshua's dirty garments and give him clean ones, pointing us to the glorious righteousness of Christ. But Satan can find nothing in Job's life which he can point out and condemn. Job's piety—the fruit of justifying faith—is truly remarkable. There is no one else like him.

Since Job is blameless and upright, Satan takes another tact. He attacks Job's righteous behavior by contending that this faultlessness and blamelessness is not sincere. Job is being bribed with wealth and the pleasures of family in exchange for his good behavior. Job is not obedient because he loves God. Rather, in his twisted mind, Satan reasons that Job is obedient because he loves the good things God has given him. Take away all of the goodies, Satan contends, and Job's faith and piety will quickly disappear. God's plan to redeem sinners will be shown to be a failure. And so in verses 9-11, Satan responds to God's question by taking up the challenge. "*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.'*"

It is important that we not miss that this is the exact opposite of the approach Satan took in Eden. In Eden, the Devil appeared to Adam and attacked the righteous ways of God. Here, the Devil appears before God and attacks a righteous man. Despite the different point of attack, the basic tactics used by the Devil are still the same. Satan starts with a subtle question, but then draws the most blasphemous of conclusions.<sup>6</sup> Job is not righteous—he loves all the things given to him by God. And God is not righteous—he is a cosmic blackmailer. Take away Job's possessions and Job's piety will vanish. God's method of redeeming sinners will be proven to be an abject failure. Bribery may get superficial results, but divine bribery cannot ultimately redeem sinners. Therefore, we must not miss the fact that by afflicting Job, Satan is attacking the very foundation of the gospel—the justice and mercy of God.

Notice, too, that all of what follows in the trials and travails of Job stems from a sovereign act of God. It is God who directs Satan's attention to Job, unlike the account in Zechariah 3, where Satan tattles on Israel's priest because of his sins. We read of God's direction in verse 12, so that "*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." What follows then, is the account of Job's trial by ordeal—a trial he must endure in order to vindicate God's redemption of sinners.

Everyone has suffered. Everyone here has lost something we prize. Some of us have suffered great loss and live in constant pain. But no one here this morning has lost as much as Job. Like a series of

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<sup>5</sup> Kline, "Job," p. 462.

<sup>6</sup> Kline, "Job," p. 462.

tsunamis, the bad news of Satan's handiwork begins to come, wave after wave.

As we pick up the account in verse 13, we read "*one day [probably that day when Job offered burnt offerings] when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, a messenger came to Job and said, 'The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, and the Sabeans attacked and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!'*" The Sabeans are Arab Bedouins, who not only took all of Job's livestock, they killed all of the servants. This is only the beginning.

According to verse 16, the earth itself seemed to turn against Job. "*While he [the first messenger] was still speaking, another messenger came and said, 'The fire of God [probably a reference to a lightning storm] fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!'*" A devastating blow—but yet another wave of bad news was still to hit. "*While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, 'The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!'*" It is still not over. One more even more painful blow was soon to fall. "*While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, 'Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!'*"

In the span of a few moments, Job learns that all his wealth has been destroyed or stolen and the joy of his life—his seven sons and three daughters—has been taken from him. Only the messengers have been spared so as to bring Job the news that the accumulated fruit of a lifetime of work is now gone. Marauding enemies and nature itself have seemingly conspired to bring Job to his knees. But the way in which this horrible loss occurred not only conceals the hand of God, but also the hand of Satan. Remember, Job does not know of the heavenly scene, nor the permission given to Satan to afflict him. If Job were an atheist, he would have had an explanation for what has just happened. The world is a cruel place. If Job were a polytheist, a dualist, a materialist or a fatalist, he would have had a ready explanation for his loss—human weakness or the forces of nature.<sup>7</sup>

But Job believes in the living God who is sovereign over the forces of nature as well as the enemies to the east. Job knows that his God is supremely good. Therefore, Job knows that these things have befallen him only because the good and almighty God has either brought these things to pass, or else has permitted these things to occur. And this brings us to the mystery of the suffering of the righteous.

The knowledge that God is both good and sovereign serves as the basis for Job's reaction to this horrible news, as recounted in verses 20-21. "*At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head,*" a common gesture of grief. Overcome with grief, Job "*fell to the ground in worship and said: 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.'*" Even as the reader's heart aches for Job, this grief-stricken man still utters words of faith. As one writer puts it, Job knows "that a man may stand before God stripped of everything, and still lack nothing."<sup>8</sup> Surely, the sentiment expressed in Psalm 73:25 comes to Job's mind,

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<sup>7</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 86.

<sup>8</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 88.

*“Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.”*

Yet Job’s great faith does not relieve his suffering, it only makes it worse.<sup>9</sup> The God whom Job loves has brought this to pass. Job has done nothing to deserve what has happened. And still, Job praises God. As we read in verse 22, *“In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.”* Job knows there is a reason for this situation, even if he must wait to discover it. Thus, out of a broken heart pours forth a doxology of praise at news of the loss of all.

**S**till Job’s ordeal is far from over. Things are only going to get worse. A second satanically-inflicted **S**ordeal is about to befall this righteous man. The tension in the story only increases.

A second heavenly scene is revealed. Satan is again summoned before the heavenly court but this time is strangely silent about the results of Job’s first ordeal. It is the Lord who calls Satan’s attention to what has happened to Job. As we read in 2:1-3, *“On another day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them to present himself before him. And 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. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason.”* Job is clearly innocent, for he is blameless and upright, even though his life has been ruined without reason.

The depths of Satan’s cynicism becomes apparent in verse 4. Job praised the Lord, acknowledging that he came into the world naked and he will depart that way as well. Satan sees in this a shrewd attempt by Job to conceal his bitterness and to bargain with God for his health. As Meredith Kline points out, Satan sees Job’s praise in the midst of his loss as a kind of health insurance.<sup>10</sup> Thus in verse 4, we read that Satan’s focus moves to Job’s physical well-being. *“Skin for skin!” Satan replied. This is probably a parody of Job’s lament about being born and dying naked.<sup>11</sup> ‘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.’”* Okay, Satan reasons, Job can withstand the loss of his possessions and children, but he will not be able to cope with the loss of his health. Remove Job’s good health, and he’ll curse God.

With the challenge issued and accepted, *“God permits the mystery of affliction to engulf his servant.”<sup>12</sup>* According to verse 6, *“The LORD said to Satan, ‘Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life.’ So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes.”* While there is great speculation about the precise nature of his illness (boils, elephantitis, or leprosy), it is difficult to diagnose the exact malady which rendered Job so miserable. We do know that the only relief Job could find was to scrape his skin with pieces of broken pottery. We also know from later references to this disease that it included darkened skin (30:28), rotting

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<sup>9</sup> Andersen, *Job*, p. 89.

<sup>10</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 463.

<sup>11</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 463.

<sup>12</sup> Kline, “Job,” p. 463.

and peeling of the skin (30:30) and maggot infested sores (7:5).<sup>13</sup>

The very sight of the greatest man of the east reduced to such a pitiful state shocked everyone. Given the nature of Job's illness and the fear that he might be contagious, Job was now forced to live in the town trash-heap, which served as both a dump and a dunghill. Job has hit rock bottom.

In verse 9, we learn why Satan did not take the life of Job's wife. Mrs. Job reminds us very much of Eve, having given in to the Devil's temptation and now (even if unwittingly) serving as his instrument of the undoing of her husband.<sup>14</sup> Her advice to her husband is exactly what Satan wants, for as we read in verse 9, "*His wife said to him, 'Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!'*" These words echo the hope of Satan that Job would curse God to his face once his health has been taken from him. With these words, Job's trial becomes most acute—his own wife and the mother of his children wants him to curse God and die. His own wife thinks he is hiding some great sin.

Again, we see why Job was the apple of God's eye and why the Lord pointed him out to the Accuser. Job replied with great restraint to this unwitting foil of the Devil, "*You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble? In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.*" Job does not speak evil of his wife, but only of her behavior. The great paradox in this is that Mrs. Job lacks wisdom, the very thing God is displaying in infinite measure in the ordeal Job is now facing. If Job has received so many good things from the Lord, he is fully prepared to receive calamity when the Lord sends it. Satan's hope that Job would curse God has come to naught. A righteousness from God is being revealed. In the struggles and obedience of Job, we are pointed to the man of sorrows, Jesus Christ.

**W**hat, then, do we learn from the account of Job and the loss of all his possessions, his children and his health?

As we look at the story of Job in light of the big picture of redemptive history, the story of Job really begins when Satan deceived Eve and then enticed her husband, Adam, to eat the forbidden fruit and plunge the entire human race into sin. But as soon as Adam fell into sin, God preached the gospel to Adam, promising to redeem him from his sins through the promised seed of the woman, who would crush the serpent's head, although the redeemer would himself be bruised in the process. In the ordeal of Job, Satan thinks that he can overturn this promise of redemption by exposing God's plan of redemption as nothing but cosmic bribery. So when God summons Satan and asks him to consider his righteous servant, Job, Satan takes the bait. When Satan afflicts Job, he is attacking God's promise to save sinners.

Unlike Adam, "the sinner Job stands triumphant, while the righteous Adam fell."<sup>15</sup> Not only does Job's faith lead him to praise God, even in the midst of trial, Job's actions thoroughly confound Satan's attack upon the gospel, while at the same time giving proof that God does indeed give a justifying righteousness to sinners, through the perfect obedience of a second Adam yet to come. In Job's triumph in the midst of this horrible ordeal, we see that there is a righteousness being revealed which is superior to Adam's and which can withstand even the greatest of satanic assaults. Satan's rage cannot overcome the wisdom

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<sup>13</sup> See the discussions in: Andersen, *Job*, p. 91; and Kline, "Job," p. 463.

<sup>14</sup> Kline, "Job," p. 463.

<sup>15</sup> Kline, "Job," p. 464.

and justice of God. Job does not like nor understand what has happened. He is utterly heart-broken and bewildered. His suffering is beyond our comprehension. But Job knows that the same God who gave him all good things, will redeem him and deliver him from whatever may befall him.

Take everything Job has away from him, and he still praises the God who made him and who will redeem him. In this ordeal, we see the triumph of God's grace, and learn that we, too, must be willing to accept the trials God sends, along with the good which so richly overflows to us.

In the ordeal of Job, we see the words of Romans 8:28-39, wonderfully fulfilled: *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. . . . If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Job has lost everything. He is devastated and grief-stricken beyond words. He has gone from being the greatest man of the east to living on the town dunghill, scratching his skin with pieces of pottery. But despite all of this, nothing can separate us from the love of God, certainly not the scheming of Satan. Despite every appearance to the contrary, Job is more than a conqueror. And so are we, if our trust is in Jesus Christ. For nothing can separate from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Not sickness. Not loss. Not death. God has not promised that we will not suffer. But he has promised that he will turn all evil to good. And this is what we learn from the sufferings of Job, who points us to the suffering and dying of our Savior, that one whose suffering redeems us from our sin, that Savior who knows what human suffering is like, and who promises to restore us and vindicate us in the end.