

July 19, 2020
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Job
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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WHEN FRIENDS CAN'T SEE
Job 1:6-2:13

As long as I can remember, I have heard about people who have been interested in U.F.O.'s and extraterrestrial life. Some people have been captivated by the possibility of life on other planets. Even groups of scientists with a reputation for being logical thinkers are caught up with the theory that life as we know it (or similar to what we experience) exists on another planet somewhere in the great outer space. To the really hardcore U.F.O. chasers, Area 51, the classified U.S.A.F. base in southern Nevada, is like Mecca. Granted, the airbase is a development and testing site for top secret military aircraft and weapons. Because it is highly classified, it has become the topic of many conspiracy theories with people suspecting that this is where the government keeps all the flying saucers they have captured over the years.

Is there life on another planet in the universe? Who knows? God does. Before we dismiss the idea of life existing somewhere other than planet earth, we need to acknowledge that there really is a parallel universe or alternative dimension. That, too, is a hot topic for science fiction types. Do I believe? I sure do.

The Word of God opens with these words: *"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth"* (Genesis 1:1). Where was He? Where is He? Jesus taught the Samaritan woman, *"God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth"* (John 4:24). God warns us that Satan is the prince or authority of the air (the sphere of this world). Daniel learned that these invisible powers wield a certain amount of authority over earthly rulers and kingdoms (Daniel 10-12). And Paul warned us believers to be alert to put on spiritual armor through prayer in order to *stand against the schemes*

of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:11-12).

So what goes on in the spirit world? How do decisions or actions in the spirit world impact your world, my world? One thing we know for certain is that God is in control of all things visible and invisible. He controls all matters of the universe for His own glory, meaning that, God arranges all circumstances to bring glory to Himself. It is the right and fitting result.

One day there was a huge conference in heaven that resulted in life-changing ramifications on earth. In particular, the circumstances crushed the righteous, godly man named Job. He had no idea what had been determined in God's council and why his pleasant life was suddenly destroyed. Job's response is pretty much the best we can expect when God is gaining glory because He is faithful, just, and trustworthy in all things. God's controlling authority is revealed in two scenes in heaven that impacted life on earth. Job's response reveals that he truly trusted God to do right.

A Divine Test (1:6-1:22).

The story of Job is built on an unseen agreement to put the servant of God to the test (vv.1:6-12). It came about because of God's question to Satan when Satan came to God (1:6-8). *Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. The LORD said to Satan, "From where have you come?" Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it."*

Sons of God is a reference to angelic created beings. They go to present themselves to God because they are answerable to Him. It is not a matter of equals working together but of subordinates reporting to their authority. That is especially true in the case of Satan reporting to God. The name "Satan" is actually a title of description. The text (as with other Bible texts) actually call him "the" satan. The word means adversary, enemy, the one who causes trouble and accuses. This angel is given that name because he resists God, works against

God, and accuses Him of being unfair and unjust. That was obvious in the Garden of Eden when he worked through the serpent to lie to Eve about God.

It is very important for us to remember that Satan is definitely not God's equal. So here Satan accuses God of being unfair to protect and pamper Job. And he desires and makes plans so that he is able to accuse Job of cursing God. Satan is pictured as working this kind of mischief all over the world. When God asked him to give an account of his evil deeds, Satan admitted that he had been *going to and fro on the earth*. It means that Satan was looking for trouble and causing trouble all over the earth.

Then God posed a question to Satan that had to do with His own work in Job. *And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" (v.8)*. In simplest definition, the term "servant" refers to a bond slave. Sounds kind of like the claim of New Testament writers like Paul and John.

In posing the question to Satan, God plainly focused on Job as one who feared Him and avoided evil. How does a person who is born a sinner and in rebellion against God do that? We "age of grace" Christians respond by saying that rebels against God become servants of God through His grace offered in salvation. Were the people in the Old Testament regenerated in a different way than the people in the New Testament? No. Everyone in the Old Testament period and the New Testament period is born again, regenerated, made righteous, through the grace of God (Ephesians 2:8-9). God's greatest glory is manifested in the trophies of His grace. Therefore, God's question to Satan asked if he had considered this sinner who He made righteous, who was rightly God's servant.

In response to God's question, Satan falsely accused Job and proposed a test intended to make God look bad. *Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face" (vv.9-11)*.

In this accusation, Satan proposed that the "health, wealth, and prosperity gospel" is why Job feared God. That is a false gospel and

Satan is still the author of it. Satan argued that Job only walked with God because God was blessing him financially and in his family.

There is no telling how many professing Christians in our culture are guilty of Satan's accusation here. It has often been said, "A good dose of persecution would empty the churches across America." Sadly that might be close to true in many cases. Several churches are already feeling the shrinkage caused by Covid. Pastors are reporting that because church attendance has become difficult, inconvenient, or impossible in some cases, some of their people have plainly stated that they are done, that they have given up on church and won't be back. When trouble comes, those who are merely religious have no reason to trust God who authorizes the trouble.

Failing to believe God's work of grace in Job, Satan challenged God to put the faithful servant to the test. *Stretch out your hand and touch all that he has* involves God personally in the test. It was not only that God allowed Satan to implement the test, but that He Himself was the authority behind it.

It is hard for us who love God to come to grips with the fact that God gave permission to Satan to make Job's life miserable. *And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand."* So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD (v.12). God granting permission was the same as authorizing the test. God turned over to Satan all of the blessings He had given Job. Why did God do that? God had to prove to Satan (and to the world) that when He makes a person righteous, the person remains righteous. God's character was at stake. God was going to prove a critical principle publicly. It is the principle that we hold dearly: *And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6)*. Proving this truth was the purpose of the test.

David Clines pointed out that an obverse test would prove the same point. Assume there is a poor but sincere follower of Christ. If God reached out His hand and made that poor saint wealthy, would the saint abandon God to enjoy his new-found wealth? Not if he is really a saint. The wise man prays to God, *Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me (Proverbs 30:8)*.

Satan walked out of God's presence and immediately Job's life was turned upside down. The whole world (through the written word) can observe the test being carried out (1:13-19). We read in verses thirteen through nineteen that most of Job's material blessing was lost. All his possessions of livestock were taken. All servants were captured or killed. Each case was an unexpected disaster. A tornado struck and killed his children (vv.18-19). The Sabeans attacked (v.15). Who saw that coming? God's fire (probably lightening) fell (v.16). Even insurance companies call that "an act of God." Chaldeans attacked (v.17). What did they have against Job?

Job's test came in four unexpected disasters. Two disasters came from people, enemies (though not personal), which would have been difficult to foresee and prevent. Two disasters came from natural elements (lightening, tempest) which no person can control.

As a result, the servant of God lost all his material possessions and all his familial blessing. While he was still reeling from the news about his possessions being taken or lost, Job got worse news. *While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, and behold, a great wind came across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they are dead, and I alone have escaped to tell you" (1:18-19).* Job's children were not being notoriously evil. They were simply doing what they normally did (1:4). A highly unusual "accident" happened and all his children were killed.

How did Job the saint respond (1:20-22)? How would you or I respond to such incredible tragedies? As we would expect, Job demonstrated grief. *Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped (v.20).* The robe referred to here was the outer garment. In Job's case, because he was so wealthy, it would have likely been a beautiful, richly ornamented robe that identified him as "high classed." Suddenly that symbolism neither fit nor was desired. Shaving his head was a common expression of mourning. Job fell to the ground out of grief and exhaustion.

But notice the next words in the text: *and worshiped*. Falling down is often connected with worship. In fact, the Hebrew word for the English "worship" means to bow down. Worship is an act of

humility. To worship is not an attempt to raise ourselves up to God, but to bow in submission before Him. This was not the response Satan was trying to get. He was wrong. Job did not rebel against God. Job did not curse God. Job did not even blame God for the disasters.

Read Job's conclusion. Job demonstrated complete and implicit trust in God in spite of the circumstances that rocked him. *And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong (vv.21-22).*

Job understood that God is the sovereign controller and held to the conclusion of wisdom. Job agreed with the conclusions Solomon would come to later. *As he came from his mother's womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand (Ecclesiastes 5:15).* *And the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7).* We are born dying. Whatever blessing we have in this life is from the hand of God.

We agree with James that, *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change (James 1:17).* And God who gives good things freely is also free to take them away in order to show that He is good and wise. Job's response to God's action in the testing was simply, *"Blessed be the name of the LORD" (v.21).* *In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong (v.22).* God was right. Satan was wrong.

Testing Increased (2:1-13).

As if the first story was not bad enough, we now read about a second agreement to test (2:1-7). The words in the first couple of verses of chapter two sound like the previous setting. Satan showed up again and God pointed out Job's steadfast faith (2:3). *And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil (v.3a)?"*

Even after severe testing, there was no one as righteous and faithful as Job on earth. God was still able to hold up Job as an

example of a righteous man. Job is still God's bond-slave. Still Job held to his integrity. God pointed out to Satan that Job *still holds fast his integrity* (v.3b). Job continued in steadfast integrity because of God's sustaining grace. All Job had to do was be empty of self and dependent on God. Satan was betting that Job would fail because God's grace would not be sufficient.

We must see in this conversation with God that Satan is ultimately to blame for the testing. God pointed out that Job held fast to his integrity, "*Although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason*" (v.3c). Satan ultimately challenged God to destroy His servant. Therefore, this testing process was not so much about the servant as it was an attack against God who deserves all glory.

But God took full responsibility for Job's suffering with the words, *incited Me*. Satan pressed God to do the unusual, stirred Him to act against His servant. This is the same idea David mentioned when he admitted that God might have stirred up Saul against him. "*If it is the LORD who has stirred you up against me, may he accept an offering, but if it is men, may they be cursed before the LORD*" (1 Samuel 26:19a). God was angry with the rebellious Israelites and incited David against them to number them (2 Samuel 24:1). And yet, in the final analysis it was Satan, the accuser, the evil doer, who tempted David to number Israel. *Then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel* (1 Chronicles 21:1).

Job had done nothing to give God reason to allow him to suffer. Satan had argued, "*Does Job fear God for no reason?*" (1:9). God threw that accusation back in Satan's face.

And yet, shocking as it seems to us, God gave permission for further testing (2:4-6). Here was the new challenge: *Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face"* (vv.4-5). Undaunted and unwilling to discuss Job's proof of righteousness, Satan makes more accusations. He argued that a person may be willing to give up everything he owns, but he will protect his life at all costs. Therefore, his challenge was, "Take away Job's health, make it look like he is dying, and he will curse you to your face." This brief, passing picture of Satan reveals how incredibly wicked he is.

But to our shock, God gave permission for Satan to further test Job. *And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life"* (v.6). Again, God proves that He is in control of the events in our lives. Again, God limits how far Satan can go.

So Satan went out and struck Job and people observed this new test (2:7-8). *So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head* (v.7). Satan struck God's servant with sickness. All sickness is the result of the sin principle. But sometimes bad health is the result of God creating opportunity to bring glory to Him (John 6; 2 Cor. 12). In some cases (as in this case), the sickness was directly attributable to Satan. Often diseases that look like epilepsy in the New Testament were actually demon possession.

On top of all his losses, Job now was suddenly struck with a terrible skin disease. Consider some of the symptoms of Job's disease that show up in the story. Job experienced severe itching (2:8), disfiguration (2:12), scabs, sores, cracks, ooze (7:5), fever and chills (21:6), darkening of the skin (30:30), diarrhea (30:27), delirium (7:4), bad breath (19:17), and extreme pain (30:17). There is no way for us thousands of years later to diagnose what the disease was. Probably a modern diagnosis would be connected with the emotional trauma Job suffered from all his losses. Surely to some extent, he would be diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

How did the servant of God respond to such a debilitating disease? *Job took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes* (v.8). He sat in the town dump, quarantined from most of society. He did what he could to treat his broken body with broken pottery. It was a picture of a man in deepest grief.

Not everyone responded to the test with such composure. Job's wife responded with a bit more emotion and, according to Job, not exactly a clear-headed conclusion (2:9-13). *Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die"* (v.9). It is difficult not to be predisposed against Job's wife because of this response. This is the only mention of her in the whole story other than Job making two passing comments. It is almost amazing how she accused Job with the same words God used to commend Job ("*hold fast your integrity*"). Apparently Mrs. Job concluded that if Job

cursed God, God would kill him. This conclusion reveals that she was not righteous, blameless, fearing God like her husband was. Therefore, the helper who was suitable for Job was not encouraging or helpful to a man who was suffering more than a human can imagine.

Also, hard to believe is Job's calm and measured response. *But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips (v.10).* Job rightly assessed his wife as a foolish woman. He rightly concluded that God is sovereign in giving good and giving trials. Unlike his wife, Job did not sin by what he said. Words are important. The Bible's wisdom literature teaches us that what a man says is what he is. *Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life; he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin (Proverbs 13:3). The words of a man's mouth are deep waters; the fountain of wisdom is a bubbling brook (Proverbs 18:4).* Jesus affirmed this truth. *"You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34).*

Then there was the response of the three friends. The story tells us that they came to show sympathy. In spite of their lack of telephones, internet, or even telegraph lines, the friends had heard of Job's incredible trials. *Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that had come upon him, they came each from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite (v.11a).* They determined to go to Job and show him sympathy. *They made an appointment together to come to show him sympathy and comfort him (v.11b).* The friends teach us a good lesson. When others suffer, it is fitting for us to show sympathy. Of course, you might have learned from experience that a proud sufferer will reject the sympathy. Show sympathy anyway because a humble sufferer will appreciate sympathy.

When the friends showed up, they saw the results of the test and it was not a pretty sight. *And when they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him (v.12a).* They wept and mourned. *And they raised their voices and wept, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads toward heaven (v.12b).* This could be partly Middle Eastern culture. But this is also what sympathy looks like.

The guys identified with Job by sitting in the dust with him, sprinkling dust on their heads.

Then they sat down several days without speaking. *And they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great (v.13).* They were silenced by suffering. They were silenced by ignorance. No one, including Job, knew why this suffering was thrust upon him. Often the best show of sympathy for someone who is suffering is to just be there with no advice, no wisdom, no attempted explanations.

Suffering is part of this journey from the cradle to the grave. Often suffering appears to have causes and solutions. But we do not always know the details about someone's suffering. We who love God and trust Him must believe that He not only knows about the suffering but is in charge of suffering as a means to reveal His glory.

When we are the one suffering, we do well to conclude with Job: *"Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?"* And even closer to our time in history, we do well to conclude with Paul in his suffering that God's grace is sufficient. *So to keep me from being too elated by the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me (2 Corinthians 12:7-9).*

When our friends suffer, we do well to be large on sympathy and small on advice knowing that we almost certainly do not know all that God is doing.