

“Job: Lose Bad Influences”

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I do want to encourage you this morning to open your Bible to the book of Job. This may be one of those portions of scripture that you may have never actually spent any time in; you may have not even known it was in the Bible. The best way to find the Book of Job and the person of Job is to open your Bible to the middle, most likely it will fall open in the Book of Psalms, and Job is the book right before the Book of Psalms in the Old Testament; Job, Psalms, then Proverbs. In just a moment we’re going to find ourselves in Job, chapters 1, 2 and 42. The men who come to my Tuesday morning Bible study were teasing me this morning because we’ve taken three years to get through half of the gospel of John and we’re about to cover 42 chapters in 27 minutes and 56 seconds. Here’s what I suggest you do: put one hand on the first chapter, one hand on the forty-second chapter and get ready to go mach-two with your hair on fire.

That being said, if you are a first time guest or visitor with us, we actually meant it as a compliment when Craig welcomed a moment ago as losers. This fall as we go throughout the Old Testament we are studying Old Testament characters who challenge us in those issues, concerns and areas in our lives that are keeping us from following Christ at an exponential rate, keeping us from being the ministers to our home, our family, and our community that we need to be, keeping us from living the life that God designed for us to live. There are certain things, we are discovering, that we are going to need to lose, to have God remove them from our lives in order to live that life He has designed for us.

When we come to the Book of Job today, we actually are going in chronological order. You may be thinking to yourself, “Weren’t we with Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis last week and if you’ve studied ahead, next week we’re going to be with Abraham who was in the Book of Genesis. Why would we go to the middle of the Old Testament?” Chronologically speaking,

the person of Job is actually next in line in our study of the characters. If you were to do a detailed study of the Old Testament chronology, he is probably either the grandson, great-grandson or great-great-grandson of Noah. So as we study the person of Job remember that he was in a time immediately after what we know as that famous flood, an area in which the world was being repopulated and soon thereafter the story of the tower of Babel would occur. So if you want to put Job in historical perspective, he is between the flood and the tower of Babel. So we find this man who is most famous, as the Book of James, chapter 5 says, for his patience.

As we study the person of Job today, we are not going to take a portion of scripture and just read it at length. I'm actually going to address some various concepts that we're going to go to the Word of God and look at. As I mentioned, you've got 42 chapters here, but the famous part of the character and the person of Job is that God allowed Satan to test him. We're going to see in just a moment that he had family removed from him, all of his belongings were removed from him, and his influence and reputation were removed from him. And the majority of the Book of Job contains a dialogue between Job and three friends discussing different theological matters, practical matters, and philosophical matters. But what we're going to get to at the end of our study today is that through the character and the person of Job, the context of the Book of Job, that every one of us is going to be challenged to lose either one or more bad influences in our lives that are keeping us from living the life that God desires us to live.

So as Job is our model for losing bad influences, I just want to look at various concepts of who he was so we can use that as an example of how to be the type of person that he was. The first concept about the person of Job is this: Job was a righteous man. If you will look at Job 1:1 it says, "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed (or turned) from evil." That's quite a story in and of itself. If that's the only verse we had of Job, it's not bad, is it? Here is a man who was perfect, upright.

If you study particularly through the Psalms and the Proverbs, it teaches us that a person is perfect and upright when they follow the commandments of God, when they adhere to the Word of God. This was a man who said no matter what the perspective is, if God said it then I'm for it; if the world goes contrary to God then I'm against it. That is where he was; that is known as righteousness: when you do it God's way and not the world's way.

This isn't just his opinion; it's not just someone else's opinion. In fact, if you will look at Job 1:8 it says, "And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that fears God, and eschews evil?" Now it's one thing to think you are those things, it's another thing for other people to think those things, but God Himself has said Job knows what he is doing, he is a righteous man.

In verse 9 Satan doesn't even argue; the accuser, the one who goes to and fro in all the earth looking for whom he can devour and destroy, look what he said. "Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Does Job fear God for nought?" By the way, the name or term Satan literally means the accuser. The accusation Satan makes to God is that Job fears God because God has blessed him, God has provided for him, God has given him so much. You ask how much did he have? Look back over into verses 2 and 3. "And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters. His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she donkeys, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east." And the accusation that Satan made was of course, he would be a righteous man, of course he would fear God, of course he would turn away from evil; look at everything that You've given him and he does it for nought.

And the famed story of Job is that God allows, He gives His permissive will to Satan to strip those things away from Job. He loses his family as we will see in just a moment. He loses all of his things. And what we are going to

discover is that Job remained righteous. So when we look at the concept that Job shows us that we need to lose some bad influences, understand that we look at a person who was a righteous man from chapter 1, verse 1.

But he wasn't only righteous. He was also, secondly, a man of resolve. What I mean by that is when the difficult times came, when things began to pinch around him, he did not give up, give in or give out. In fact, one of my favorite statements about Christians is this: a Christian is much like a teabag; you know how strong they are when you get them into hot water. That's exactly what happens to the person of Job. As I mentioned, Satan said to the Lord, "He only does this because you bless him." Turn to Job 1:20-22. He has had all ten children killed in one day. He has lost every one of those animals that we have mentioned. He has lost his house, his influence, and all of his servants. The only person in his life, the only thing in his life that he still possesses is his wife, and that's about to go south in just a moment. Look at Job 1:20-22. After he has had everything in life removed, you talk about a man of resolve. "Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. In all of this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly."

Wow! What a man! Imagine losing everything you claim to possess in one day, at one time, literally in a matter of hours. And even though he is hurting, even though this is agonizing, he was resolved not to turn his back on God; he continued to worship God. And it says in verse 22 that he did not sin.

Chapter 2 picks up the story in continuum. Satan once again appears before the Lord. The Lord says, "Well, it didn't work, did it? I told you he wasn't a hypocrite; I told you he wasn't faking. I told you he would worship Me if I was the only thing left." Satan said, "Oh what a man will do if his life is threatened. Let me touch him." And God said, "That's okay, Job will continue to worship Me for the right reasons. Go ahead and touch him but you cannot take his

life. You can inflict harm on him physically but you cannot take his life.”

In chapter 2 this is what occurs: in addition to losing all of his things, all of a sudden he loses his health. There is a horrible condition and we find him going to an ash pile, or some of your Bibles say he goes to a dunghill. Literally, he goes to the garbage dump, takes pottery and he is scraping his skin that has all these boils on it just to relieve the pain. He is in a mess. Now understand, he’s lost his family, he’s lost his possessions and he has now literally lost his health. And look at what happens beginning in Job 2:8, talk about a man who is resolved: “8And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes. 9Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die. (In other words she is saying you know; there just comes a point where you’ve got to give up. This God thing sounds good, this righteousness in fearing God but have you not looked around? You just need to look in a mirror and you’ll see what’s going on.) 10But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaks. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips.”

So when we look at Job as a model for losing bad influences, he’s not only righteous in the good times but he is righteous in the bad times. He is resolved to do the things of God. And what we find in the character of Job, and this is the third point today, is that Job was not only righteous and resolved, but he was an incredible man of reputation. Not only did God say that he was perfect and upright, not only did Satan agree that he was perfect and upright, but there are other passages of scripture in the Bible that look back to Job.

I want you to see from one of the old prophets, a man by the name of Ezekiel, what he had to say about Job. Let me give you a little perspective about Ezekiel. This is during what we call the Babylonian captivity. Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians had come into Judah, into Jerusalem and had taken them captive and back to Babylon. This is that famous time period when you’ve got Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego,

that whole story, all the exiles and all kinds of horrible situations. The Israelite people are so down on their luck, for lack of better terms. They are literally looking up at the bottom of the barrel saying there is no way that deliverance can happen, there is no way that we can get any help.

And in the midst of that, a man speaking on behalf of God, the prophet known as Ezekiel, in Ezekiel 14:20, has the Israelites remember three people. He says, "Have you not heard of Noah, Daniel and Job?" Now I don't know about you, but that is keeping good company. After all, what was the real reputation of Job? Was he just a man who was righteous and wouldn't quit? No, he was the only one who would stand up with God rather than bowing down against Him. Was not Noah the one in Genesis 6 when it says all the world was in wickedness but that Noah found grace in the eyes of God? Was it not Daniel during this time of captivity when everybody else was praying to a false god, that three times a day he went into his chambers and prayed to God and God alone? So when we put Job in the mix of that reputation we find a man who is not just resolute, who is not just righteous; his reputation is when all the world says this is a good idea but God says it is not that he sided with God.

When we talk about the bad influences that have a tendency to take us away from the things of God in our lives, let me tell you a little secret. Quantitatively speaking, you will have more bad influences than you will have Godly influences in this world. And if you just listen to the numerical value of the voices you will get sucked in. But Job's reputation is one who said it doesn't matter if even my wife and everybody else say I should give up on God, I will not go against the things of God.

Then look in the book of James 5:11. By the way, in the Book of James every illustration is from the Old Testament, whether it's Abraham, Sarah or whoever it is. In the last chapter of the Book of James when it's encouraging us to stay strong in the midst of tough times, verse 11 says remember the patience of Job, one who hung in there.

By the way, speaking of hanging in there, how long did this experience last? We just don't know. As he goes out onto the ash piles, to the dunghill, and his friends come and begin to argue with him, we just don't know how long the time period was. We know that his friends sat there for seven days before saying a word and then they entered in the dialogue. We don't know if it took a couple of weeks or a couple of months; the Word of God doesn't tell us. All we know is he never gave up, gave in or gave out. He said I will still stand with God rather than bowing down to another.

So what did this produce in Job's life? His righteousness, his resoluteness, his reputation for if he had to stand alone he would stand alone. What happened; what is the product of this? Restoration. In other words, God restored him for his faithfulness. And I think that's one of the greatest lies of the devil: that if we lose things in our lives, if we struggle in our lives for the sake of Christ that somehow he whispers in our ears, "You know what? God can never bring that back. God can never do that work again in your life." I want you to turn to Job, chapter 42 and I want to show you the end of the story and then we'll get to the bad influences.

In Job 42 we find out that God restored double-fold an increase of what Job had. Remember all those animals that he had that were taken away from him that day? His friends came around and told him this was proof that he was not in God's will, that he had everything taken away from him. I want you to look at verse 12, the last page of the Book of Job, after Job has stayed faithful, after he has this encounter. "So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she donkeys." Twice as much "stuff," responsibility, power and a future than he had before. That's what happens when we stay righteous, resolute, and a man of reputation in God's eyes. Somehow, some way, God just supernaturally restores us.

But it is the next two verses that really get me. "He had also seven sons and three daughters. And he called the name of the first, Jemima; and the

name of the second, Kezia; and the name of the third, Kerenhappuch.” Now I don’t know if you noticed something, but if you’ll go back to chapter 1, verse 2 it also says in the midst of all that Job possessed in the beginning that he had three daughters and seven sons. Many people have come to Job 42 and said, “Look what happens when you do what God asks you to do and you don’t give up, give in or give out; He gives you a double-fold blessing.” God didn’t give him a double-fold blessing; he didn’t end up with twenty children, did he? He ended up with ten.

Now I’m going to be real honest with you for a moment because let’s think tangibly. In theory, if you had a thousand dollars and you lost that thousand dollars and the Lord somehow blessed you with two thousand dollars, you would easily say, “I was doubly blessed.” Why? Because it’s just money; it comes, it goes. But as the dad of three little boys, if I put myself in the position of Job and I were to lose my three children like Job did, I don’t want six new boys – I want the three I had. I don’t find it ironic, coincidental at all, that in the last chapter there were ten children. Do you know what the statistical possibility is of having ten children in the exact same gender order as he had earlier? By the way, I want you to read chapter 42 and find out where his wife is. She’s not there and there is no mention of a new one.

And you ask what are you trying to get at? The Bible doesn’t conclusively say this but there are people such as Lazarus and Jarius and others in scripture who got to experience the Lord Himself raising people from the dead. You know the Bible doesn’t say if these are ten new children, it doesn’t say if it’s the original ones that He brought back to life; but I do find it interesting that it’s the same number of children and the same gender distribution and no mention of the old wife or the new wife. And I think what you get at the end of Job is that when we are resolute, when we are faithful, when we are willing to stand with God, even if everybody else tells us to bow down, God can even raise from the dead that which we thought could never return again. That’s called supernatural.

So what is it after all of that, that was so powerful about Job and this whole story that we need to imitate and emulate in our lives? He was a man of righteousness; he was a man that was resolved; he was a man of reputation; he was a man that experienced restoration. But here's the last word and this is a word that is so rare: he was a man of repentance. The word repentance is not just associated with sin; the word repentance literally means to turn or to change your direction. When confronted with a crossroads, when shown God's way versus the world's way, what we see in Job 42 is that he chose God's way.

I want you to look at Job 42. “1Then Job answered the LORD, and said, 2I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. 3Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. 4Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. 5I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. 6Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”

Now you may be thinking to yourself why is that a man of this magnitude, of this greatness, of this righteousness, why would verse 6 be in there? What we see in the character and the person of Job is there were three specific bad influences that came into his life that he refused to succumb to. He would not go down that road and he eliminated them from his life. And what I am about to share with you will change your life because it changed Job's life if you will repent of these bad influences.

Bad influence number one: bad people. In other words, Job was not willing to be around those who were dragging him away from God. This doesn't mean that he wasn't a missionary; this doesn't mean that he didn't "go out into the world." He didn't find a cave and hide himself. He just said, "I'm not going there with them." For thirty plus chapters in the middle of the Book of Job, these three so called friends; Eliphaz, Zophar, Bildad and a fourth man named Elihu who he doesn't even bother answering, come to him and basically say, "Job, you are wrong. You are not being faithful

to God. Surely, we know more than God does because the God you are presenting is the wrong God.” Do you know what happens in chapter 31 of the Book of Job? Job looks at his three friends and says, “You don’t have a clue of what you’re talking about. The words of Job are shut.” In other words he said, “There comes a point in life where you are dragging me away from God and I just don’t need to be around you in this situation.”

Let me give you a dramatic example. Some of you may be familiar with this: years ago, long before we ever moved to Georgia, the Lord blessed Traci and me with the opportunity for six and one-half years of our lives that we were in vocational evangelism. I traveled from church to church, city to city, country to country preaching about 200 nights a year. And in all those different environments; the traditional revival setting, Bible conferences, etc., I would go into local schools in those communities; high schools, junior highs, and even sometimes elementary schools. One of the things they would let me do was give a presentation to those children then invite them to the night service, a youth night, a student night or a children’s night. I couldn’t share the gospel; I couldn’t quote the Bible; I couldn’t talk about Jesus. But I could talk about making good, wise decisions and then at the end inviting them to such and such church and we’re going to talk about the most important decision a person needs to make. That was kind of the hook.

As part of my presentation, particularly to high school and junior high students, I shared the story of a friend I have known my whole life; a man who has been so blessed materially and had so much given to him in so many items – wealthy beyond wealthy and influence among influence. But because of some horrible influences in his life, in addition to, but mainly dealing with alcohol and drugs, he literally lost it all. And I would share his story to these students: you can gain everything the world has to offer but if you make some bad decisions, you can lose it all.

A couple of years ago, I had the opportunity to share a meal with this individual. He had been “clean” for six months; he hadn’t touched a drop

of alcohol, hadn't been on any drugs. He was clean for six months. He knew that as part of my high school and junior high presentation I shared his story and he was excited that I shared his story. He was glad that it could help others. He said, 'But Jeff, when you're in the Texas area, I want to be able to come and share my story first-hand. Would you let me come and share my story?' I said, "No, I won't." He said, "Well, why not?" I said, "You've only been clean six months. When you've been clean twelve months, I'll let you do it." He kind of got discouraged and then I said something that he didn't like very much. "The problem is I don't think you'll make it to twelve months because you're still hanging around the same people you were when you got in trouble. And if you're still hanging around the ones who drag you away from the things of God, guess what's going to happen? You're going to get dragged from the things of God."

People who have dealt with addictions and all kinds of imprisonments will tell you that one of the first things you've got to do is make a decision to stay away from bad influences and oftentimes those are people. There are people who will talk you into "breaking up" your family. There are people who will talk you into doing things illegally. There are people who will talk you into doing anything and everything but the things of God. And what Job said is, "You guys who are trying to get me away from the things of God, I don't need to be hanging around you any more. I don't need this." Some of you need to make a decision today that even though you may still have contact with and communication with, you need to quit having the influence of some people in your life who are dragging you away from the things of God because they will keep dragging you. That's the first thing that Job repented of; he said I'm not going down that road with you.

The second thing is this: not only bad people, but bad places. Now Job is on the ash heap, he's on the dung-hill. He is mourning for the situation that is in his life. His friends try to communicate to him throughout the middle of the Book of Job to get off of that hill, get off of this place and come back with us; we'll take care of you. Number one: they were a bad influence because they

were going against the things of God. And not only can “people” be a bad influence in our lives, so can certain places. There’s an old joke that there is nothing good any Baptist boy should be or go to anywhere after midnight. I’ve learned time and time again that oftentimes being at the wrong place at the wrong time will get you in trouble. And that’s exactly what Job said, “Until God tells me to get off of this hill, I’m not getting off of it.” And when we listen to the world, it says you need to do this and to be a part of that.

This was made very vivid to me several years ago and don’t panic when I say this because you just may not be knowledgeable of this. But what we know as the Southern Baptist Convention, when the churches gather together every year, typically it’s pastors and ministers but there are lay people, anybody can come who wants to come. This past year, Traci and our family were in Phoenix; next year I have no idea where it is but we will be wherever it is. That being said, several years ago the convention was in New Orleans, Louisiana, not quite the city known for its righteousness.

I remember we were going from one meeting to the next and it was one of those times in life when the guys that were there didn’t have children yet. It was in the “BC” era: “before children.” The guys just kind of hang out at the convention and our wives weren’t there. There were about seven or eight of us; all of us were in seminary together, all of us were pastors just in different places all over America. So you feel like you’re in pretty good company when you’re walking with that group of people because after all, you’ve got good accountability in a city that’s not known for a Godly reputation.

We were going from one meeting to the next; it was about a seven to eight block walk. It was in the middle of the day and it was hot; it was New Orleans hot. You know what I’m talking about; it was about 105 degrees plus the humidity and everybody is sweating. But in order not to have a seven or eight block walk, there was a shortcut. That shortcut was through the lobby of a casino. Now all of a sudden we had this grand theological conversation on the pier. “If we just look forward, keep your head straight, don’t look,

I'll vouch for you and you vouch for me. Let's just cut through." Until one guy piped up: "Guys, we can't do it." "What do you mean we can't do it – it's the lobby, no big deal, we'll just cut through and be fine." He said, "No, you don't understand. Before I got saved I had a gambling addiction. I can't even go in. Please, as my friends, don't even take me in the door."

And for eight blocks we walked around the casino because he understood something that most of us don't. We think no big deal – I can handle it, I'm tough enough. No, you're not. And when you have something in your life, an area in your life, a place in your life that drags you from the things of God and you say it won't hurt me just to sit there, but pretty soon sitting turns into other things. And going turns into other things and so the influences of people lead us away from God and the influences of places lead us away from God.

Then there is this last thing which gets us back to verse 6: there are bad philosophies - bad thinking. And I know we don't have the time or the course for the person of Job today, but understand it was easy for him to tell his friends to be quiet, you're taking me in the wrong direction. It was easy for him to say I'm not getting off the hill because God told me to stay on the hill. But throughout that discussion Job kept saying but I'm right, but I'm right. And he fell under this trap of thinking those who are righteous, those who don't fraternize with the wrong people and don't go to the wrong places, he fell into the trap of thinking he was good enough, strong enough and tough enough. And God showed up in chapter 38 and showed him who God was and His name was not Job.

But in chapter 42:6 it says, "Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." The character of Job decided not to be around the wrong people; he decided not to go into the wrong places that would take him away from the things of God. But let me tell you the problem he had because this may affect some of you more than the first two: he thought that he knew best and that he was strong in life. And what God shows up and says to Job is that you may be perfect and upright, you may fear God and eschew evil, but

if you have that attitude of overconfidence, not thinking you can fall, not thinking you can get sucked in the trap, I hate to tell you, but you're going to get sucked in the trap. And that's a bad philosophy when we think we got this thing called life so well under wraps that it doesn't matter where we go or who we are with that we are strong enough. Let me tell you an honest secret: every one of us is one step away from being in the wrong place at the wrong time with the wrong people when we have the philosophy of I'm strong enough and I'm tough enough. And Job did, but he said, "I quit, God."

Number one: he turned from the people who were a bad influence. Number two: He turned from the places. Number three: he said I'm going to turn away from that philosophy; from this point forward every decision I make, rather than trusting in my own self, my righteousness, and my strength, I'm going to turn everything to You.

Now I don't know about you, but I think every one of us here as we approach our time of invitation has a decision to make. I think every one of us has some people in our lives that we listen to a lot who are taking us away from the things of God. Maybe there are places in our lives that we visit and experience that are taking us away from the things of God. Or maybe if it's not those first two, we have the philosophy that it doesn't matter where we go or who we're with, we're on the same page with God. Whatever those three things are or whichever one it is, understand that Job was restored but not before he repented. Not before he said, "Okay God, I'm going to stop going this way. I'm going to go Your way." We have got to remove the bad influences; we have got to lose them if we want to be all that God has designed us to be. Let's pray.