

## **Job 1:1, 2:1-10**

There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.

One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the Lord. The Lord said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the Lord, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason."

Then Satan answered the Lord, "Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives. But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." The Lord said to Satan, "Very well, he is in your power; only spare his life."

So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord, and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. Job took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and sat among the ashes.

Then his wife said to him, "Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die." But he said to her, "You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.\*

## **The Good and the Bad** - October 3, 2021

*Job 1:1, 2:1-10*

How to explain how God works? I mean isn't that the core question of our lives? If you're an atheist, then you say there is no such thing as God and we human beings are merely the product of random chance. There is nothing over us or under us. We are just here.

The atheistic position, in other words, the belief in no God, is appealing. If there is nothing above us or below us, then we're free to do whatever we want, aren't we? If we human beings are just here, by chance, on this particular planet, by chance, then what really matters? I mean, if there is no God, then here we are, all by ourselves, are we not?

If we are all by ourselves, if there is nothing or no being responsible for putting us here, then truly, what is stopping us, any of us, for simply "going for the gusto?" Why shouldn't you or I do whatever we feel like doing?

If there is no such thing as God, if there are no standards or expectations, then what is constraining us from doing whatever we please? I mean really, why should we care about anyone besides ourselves? Why should we care about our neighbors, or our community, or our nation, or our world? Why shouldn't we live our lives in a way that gets us the most pleasure we can regardless of how it affects others?

I mean, what difference does it make if my decisions hurt other people? So what, what do they have to do with me? What difference does it make if the way we are using the Earth's limited resources affects future generations? So what? I'll be dead, let them deal with the consequences. If I feel like hurting or even killing another human being, why should that matter? If I have the money or the power, then why should I not use my money and power to serve me and make me richer and more powerful?

Without God. Without guidance. Without a standard on which we should live our lives, isn't human existence a kind of free-for-all? Isn't life a chaotic mess from which there is no escape, no stability, no accountability?

My question for you today is: Are you frustrated? Are you confused? Are you wondering to the core of your being how there can be so much selfishness and hatred in the world? Do you, are you longing to hear how all this incredible anger can be reigned in and some kind of morality be restored to the world?

I don't know. Maybe you just don't care. Maybe you feel, "Well, I've got my job or my retirement account, or my pension so I'm set." Maybe you say to yourself, "Yes, the world is messed up, but I'm OK. Why should I care about what's going on?"

And you know, folks that's cool. We look out for number one, don't we? It's sad that others have problems, but I don't so why should I care at all?

That my friends, is the world as it is. If I'm OK today, then why should I care about anyone else or how the world is messed up. My life is fine, thank you very much. God or no God. Why do I need God?

And that, friends, that is the central question of life and living: Is there a God and do we need a God in our lives?

So today we come to the book of Job. Job is probably one of first books of the Bible actually written down, which makes a lot of sense. I mean, the whole point of this church stuff is that we claim that there is something called God. This God we say not only created the universe in which we live and established the rules by which this universe functions; we also say this universe-creating God also, incredibly, has a personal relationship with every creature God has created. The God who made the stars, we believe, also made you and also made me.

What do you think about that? That's kind of mind-blowing, isn't it? We believe the same God who created the Sun and this Earth also created DNA and eggs and sperms and the incredible impossible process by which human beings are created and come into this world. Wow!

To believe in a creator God means to accept that idea that you and I and everything all around us are not here by chance, but here quite intentionally. In other words, we are not accidents. We are not products of chance. You, me, everyone and everything around us are here because we are meant to be here.

From the beginning....

What do you think of that? Obviously, since you are online or in-person with us today, you must be at least willing to entertain the idea that life has some kind of guidance and order. Something or someone is behind all that we see, and hear, and think, and do. There is not randomness to our universe, but some kind of order and purpose and guidance and wisdom.

And that is what the book of Job is all about. Job is one of the first attempts of human beings to try to explain how God works in our lives.

Recall the story of Job. In essence, Job is the story of a man who had everything he could want. He was rich. He had a family. He lived a great and wonderful life. In short, Job was the ideal that people wanted to have. Pick your favorite rich person today. Pick the person whose life you want to have. Well, that's Job. Back then, by the standards of his day, he had it all.

So the question the Book of Job asks is quite straightforward: How does a man react, a man who has it all, has everything taken away from him? Job had it all. In a few short weeks, he lost it all: his family, his wealth, and lastly, his health. The book of Job paints a scenario, a very human scenario, where someone goes from best to worst. He loses his material possessions. He loses his children and just about everyone who loves him. Finally, he loses his good health, being afflicted with a skin disease that requires him to scrape at the sores covering his body with a piece of pottery. Moreover, his wife, the woman he shared his wonderful and prosperous life with, is of absolutely no use to him. Her advice to her once-rich husband is to, "Curse God and die." Thanks, Honey.

Now the author of the book of Job creates a background story in which God and Satan are having a discussion. And the point of the discussion is that Satan claims the only reason people worship God is

because they have it good. In other words, human beings love God when things are going their way. When times get hard, they will run away from God.

And, friends, you know the Satan in this story has a point. It is, after all, easy to follow God, easy to give to the church, easy to speak the prayers and sing the songs and attend worship when things are going our way. Yep, my life is good, God must be on my side. I'll go to church today and throw a dollar or two in the collection as my way of saying thanks.

And we know of many people like that. The "Higher Power" people. The "Jesus is just alright with me" people. And so many others. Religion for them is just another recreational activity, so long as it seems to be meeting their needs and expectations. In a way, the surprising thing in our country, our very rich and frightfully prosperous country, is not that faith and religion are collapsing in record numbers. No, the surprising thing is that churches managed to last so long in spite of our prosperity!

For a while, for a fairly decent amount of time, prosperous Americans were willing to at least entertain the idea that their wealth and their good lives were not exclusively the product of their hard work and educations. No, for a while, Americans were a bit willing to acknowledge that perhaps, just perhaps, an unseen and not-always-understandable God might have something to do with the wealth and power and love and relationships we have in our lives. For a while, many people could live with the thought that they were blessed — undeservedly and unexpectedly touched by the inexplicable grace of God. Because of the sheer mystery of our being blessed by a grace-filled God, some have had the idea of giving God our thanks and our praise.

So far, so good. But what about the bad times? When things go bad for us, what then? When we lose that job, when our relationships fail apart, when we get sick, how do we relate to God? Do we relate to God? Or do we just shut down and run away?

That is the question of Job. Does the man who had it all still believe in God when things go bad, or does he curse God and die? And that's the question for us all. And that is the central question of life and living.

If there is a God who supposedly created us and loves us, then why should anything bad happen to us? Why is it that people of faith spend the same amount of time on Earth as non-believers do? There is no evidence that believers get sick at lower rates than non-believers. I don't know for certain, but if believers kept their jobs longer than non-believers, I would think more employed people would be in church. Of course, we in the faith camp want to believe that our relationships are better and stronger and longer-lasting than those of non-believers, but proving that claim is not easy.

In the book of Job, the author paints a scenario where the supposedly loving God allows Satan to make life bad for Job. Well, thanks a lot, Lord! Is God up there taking to Satan about you and me today? Is God thinking, "Hey, let's see what happens if Pastor Bob's life gets turned upside down." It might be quite entertaining to see how Bob reacts. Does Bob really believe this stuff or does he say it because he's paid to? Hmmm.

Hmmm, indeed. The book of Job details the steadfast quest of a man who believes to the core of his being that he has done nothing to deserve the triple-whammy of losing his wealth, his family, and his health almost all at once. Later in the book, friends come to visit and sympathize with him. Yet even his friends end up insisting that Job's problems must stem from some terrible crime he committed. His friends kept trying to get Job to confess his sins and Job says he has done nothing to deserve his fate.

Rather Job takes a radically different position. Job, throughout the book, chooses to trust in God even when he doesn't understand God. I'll repeat: Job has faith that God exists, God is in charge, and God does things human beings cannot hope to understand.

The problem all of us face as human beings is that we would like to have a God who is explainable. We want to make sense of everything that is happening around us, because it makes us feel secure. Sure, when things are going well, it's easy to think that we're doing what God wants and God is rewarding us with the good things of life. But when things go bad, losing jobs, losing love, losing health, even when we think we are doing our best to serve God, that is when the trouble begins. That is when the doubts arise. That is when faith falters.

When faith falters, when we have doubts, when we accept the good things that happen with ease but struggle when the bad things happen, that is when we run away from God. That is when we question the existence of God. That is when we think we're better off without the church, without faith, without God. In short, when things go bad, some people, many people convince themselves that we can do it all by ourselves.

Ah, but can we? Whether times are good or times are bad, can we really go it alone?

When we exclude God from our lives, then we make ourselves our own law. We worship ourselves. We make ourselves God. We release ourselves from any responsibility to our fellow human beings and our decisions are, in our opinions, always right.

To quit on God and put ourselves in charge may work for awhile on the outside, but when we claim that God has nothing to do with us and that we are on our own, how do we deal with the problems and setbacks? If we claim there is no God, then we have no one to cry out to, no one to blame, and most importantly, no one from whom to accept help. If we believe we are in total control and things go wrong, then we will torture ourselves nonstop, trying to figure out how and why we failed.

All alone and blaming ourselves. That's life without God.

Job dared put forward an idea that is still radical today: there is a God, this God is in charge, and while God made us, God never, ever, has to explain Godself to us. Humans are humans and God is God and with the sole exception of Jesus Christ, they are not the same.

So we are back to the question of Job, the central question of our existence. Do we, will we, can we live with the idea that God gets to be God and owes us no explanation as to why things go wrong? Can we

accept the idea that good things and bad things will always happen to us and we will not always be able to understand them.

Can you live with that? Can you accept that? If you can't, there is not much point to your being here. But if you can, if you agree with Job that we worship a God we can't always understand, you will have trust in your life. You will have hope. You will know peace.

I say these words in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.