



## JOB'S SECOND TEST

Text: Job 2

By: Rev Dr Leo Douma

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A Jewish rabbi wrote a best-selling book called 'When bad things happen to good people'. The title implies that something is not right if good people suffer. If bad people do stupid things and create their own suffering, we can understand that. But suffering that randomly strikes good people doesn't seem right. Job struggled with that. The very first verse of the book says, *"This man (Job) was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil."* The scene in heaven in chapter 1 showed God holding up Job as a wonderful example of a "servant" of God. Even after Satan took all Job had, including his children, we read that Job *"...fell to the ground in worship...Job did not sin by charging God with wrong doing."* Now in chapter 2 we see that God is still singing the praises of Job. The scene is again in heaven where the angels came to present themselves before God. Satan is there again as well. Then notice verse 3 *"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 still he maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason.'" God initiates the discussion about Job. As predicted Job brought glory to God by his faithfulness in his suffering. This is now the third time we are told Job was "blameless and upright, a man who fears God". Twice by God himself. So, you can't miss the point, can you? Job is an exceptionally good man. This is vital information when we get into the long arguments between Job and his friends.*

We see here how God has a strong word for Satan: *"...you incited me against him without any reason"*. Now in this you notice how God takes responsibility for what happened to Job. Satan stirred up trouble, but God is always sovereign. It is interesting

that throughout this book as Job raises his issues, his complaints are against God, never Satan. At the end of the book it is God and Job that are reconciled. Satan doesn't come into the picture again after this chapter. We see also how God says Job suffered "...without any reason." He did not suffer for doing wrong. This wording focuses on the crux of Job's testing. It is difficult enough to endure a hardship if there is a good goal in sight. Like our spiritual growth. You can even cope if you know it's your own fault. There's a 'reason' for your suffering. But to undergo random suffering plunges a person into agonizing self doubt. You end up thinking: 'There must be something really wrong with me if I am going through all this!' To struggle with the meaninglessness of random suffering is more difficult than the actual loss you suffer. God's point of saying "...without reason." refers back to Satan who said in chapter 1: 'Does Job worship you "without cause"? Satan's point was that Job only worshipped God for all his blessings. And when the blessings were taken Job would curse God. Only Job had not done that. He had worshipped him God.

But Satan we see in verses 4&5 is undaunted in his attitude. He persists in his skepticism. He implies Job hasn't really been tested. God set up too many restrictions the first-time round. Look at what he says (:4) "*Skin for skin...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.*" 'Skin for skin' means that a person will exchange anything he has for something else of similar value. Basically, Satan is saying that a human being is utterly selfish. A person will give up anything as long as they can hang onto their own life. Satan seems to know a lot about the dark side of humanity. He knows about those who would walk on anyone, betray or sacrifice anything, if only they can live. He assumes it of Job as well. 'God, let Job get real sick. Let him stare death in the face and he will curse you'. So, again God allows Satan to strike out at Job. Again, he sets the boundary-(:6) "...you must spare his life." And, again, Job has no idea of this exchange between God and Satan.

The verses 7-10 bring us out of heaven and back to the scene on earth. We see that Job is terribly ill. He is covered with "*painful sores*", or boils, from "*the soles of his feet to the top of his head.*" We don't know what exactly the illness was. Job describes some of his symptoms in his speeches in the following chapters, things like disfiguration, infected sores that scab over, crack and ooze; sores infested with worms; fever with chills; darkening and shriveling of the skin; eyes red and swollen from crying;

diarrhea; sleeplessness and being delirious; bad breath; excruciating pain throughout his body. Job was suffering from multiple complications. Not knowing how God had restrained Satan, Job would have felt for sure that he was a dead man. He is seen as cursed. He sits outside the city in the town's ash heap. It was the rubbish dump, where the ash from the cities ovens was dumped, as well as all the town rubbish. The smell of the place would have been putrid. Job sprinkles dust on his head, rolls in the ash, and sits on the ash heap. It was the ancient way of expressing one's deepest grief. He sits there all alone. He is totally isolated from the community in which he was once considered the "*greatest man in the east*". Instead of being the respected figure he is now the butt of gossip and jokes. Not only has he lost everything, including his health, he is utterly humiliated. He sits there in silence, a broken man, mourning his terrible fate. We can only begin to imagine the way his grief and dreadful illness are affecting his mind. From time to time he scrapes himself with a bit of broken pottery. It might cause more bleeding. But it relieves the awful itch, the endless irritation of all those boils.

Now onto the scene, for the first time comes his wife. Perhaps she has always been by his side. But now the writer widens the camera angle and shows her there. Job's desperate plight provokes her to cry out: (:9) "*Are you still holding onto your integrity? Curse God and die!*" What are we to make of this? Is she speaking for Satan, encouraging Job to 'curse God'? She uses the same expression as God when she speaks of Job's 'integrity'. God saw Job's integrity as his strength. But instead of seeing it as Job's greatest asset she sees it as fanaticism, a refusal to face up to reality. 'All your faith isn't getting you anywhere. Look at you! You are so sick you are as good as dead. Why stubbornly hang on. Curse God and die.' I presume her thinking was to shorten his suffering. She can't stand to see him the way he is. So, to lessen the time of suffering if Job cursed God then God would finish him off. While we often focus on the person suffering, their loved ones are often struggling terribly as well. I remember a time when one of my children was very ill. I argued with God to leave them alone and let me be ill instead. It can be so upsetting not being able to do anything as we watch the one we love slowly sinking. One minute we pray for healing. Then we pray God take them quickly. We get angry with each other. We get angry with God. Anger with God is a very common reaction to suffering. The positive point to take from the reaction of Job's wife is that her anger is directed towards God. In doing that she it is

an act of belief that recognizes God and his sovereignty. It is a struggle with God. Which is far better than burying all emotion and gradually seeing faith die off.

We can feel for Job's wife. But it doesn't help him very much. In fact, it puts another burden on him. As if his suffering isn't bad enough, she now tempts him on the very thing Satan is trying to achieve: 'Curse God'. So, with a strong determination not to let her words get the better of him Job says (verse 10) "*You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?*" The Hebrew word for fool, 'nabal' is the strongest word for fool. It referred to some one who completely renounced God's ways. Job is not calling his wife a fool. But what she says is like what an unbelieving woman says. Job's wife is not an evil woman. At the end of the book we see that she and Job have many more children. But there are times in our suffering when we say things that are out of order. That's what Peter did when he spoke sharply to Jesus. Jesus reprimanded Him "*Get behind be Satan.*" Job would not curse God for his suffering. In fact, he makes clear that if we accept that God is God, then he determines our lives. As his servants, we must receive what he gives, the good and the bad. That is the nature of our relationship with God. He is Lord and master and we are his creatures living for his glory, in whatever way God requires that.

Now the writer is setting up here the basis for Job's struggle in the speeches that are to come. Job may well be bewildered as to why he is suffering, since he is a good man. He doesn't blame Satan. Nor the terrorists or cyclone that took his possessions and kids. Job insists that his suffering is from God's hand. That's the depth of his faith. And therein lies his problem. Job's keeps his integrity. He keeps the faith. He goes on trusting in God. But his faith doesn't relieve his problem. It makes it worse. Only a man with deep faith in God sees suffering as a problem. The atheist must come to terms with suffering as well. But it is just part of the absurdity of living in a meaningless world. 'Stuff happens'. They are just simply tragic accidents. But for Job, there are no 'accidents' in a universe ruled by the one sovereign Lord. God is both good and almighty. If God is so all powerful and so loving, then why should those who love him suffer? This is the crux of Job's struggle in the following 40 chapters. While his friends push him to repent of his terrible wrong, Job keeps saying, 'I am not wrong. I feel God is wrong. And I want to know why this has happened to me?' Was Job arrogant in this? Note the last part of verse 10 "*In all this Job did not sin in what he said.*" The Hebrews saw a man's speech as an indicator of his soul. To keep one's speech pure meant that the heart was pure.

Now in verses 11-13 the writer sets up the scene for the 40 chapters of speeches between Job and his three friends. While they may mess up things later, here we see a deeply moving scene as Job's mates together agree to visit him. They come from various far away places, and met together to console and comfort Job. Good friends are not just fair-weather friends. Helping in the really difficult times is what real mates do. But when they got closer to Job they were awestruck. They saw the destruction of all his property as they came through the land. And when they saw Job on the ash heap they could hardly recognize him. Words used of Jesus in Isaiah 53 do not seem out of place here: *"He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised..."* The friends offered traditional gestures of grief. They *"...wept aloud, tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads."* And then amazingly (:13) they *"...sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was."* Do you sense how deep their friendship was? Do we realize the utter importance of just being there for another? How important it is to give the space and time for a person to feel their pain and yet support from friends? Too often when we visit a friend who is hurting, we feel the need to say something, to say something comforting. But too often we come out with some pious platitude. Or something that comes out wrong. Often silence is more eloquent than words. If I suffer, what do I really want? Not lots of words. But simply for another's presence. Someone to hold me, to stay with me, to care for me. Someone to represent the presence of Christ to me. One writer has said that *"...presence is a service of vulnerability. To be present to others is to put oneself in the position of being vulnerable to what they are vulnerable to, and of being vulnerable to them. It means being willing to suffer what the other suffers and to go with the sufferer in his own suffering."* In its deepest form, it is what Jesus did for us on the cross. Jesus knows what it is to suffer in our place, to bring healing through his death and resurrection. As R.C. Sproul put it once 'Why do bad things happened to good people? That only happened once, and he volunteered.' To go through suffering, we need to cling in faith to Jesus who understands what suffering is. It means to allow God, through our Christian friends, to carry us in his grace. Suffering can leave us struggling with doubts about God's love. But then remember Jesus on the cross. Remember how God in his grace suffered deeply to make us his own children. If God

gave so much, surely, we can trust him. Supporting friends are acts of grace by God. They represent his never-ending care, his ever-present help in all our situations.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

*These questions can be followed up personally, with a Christian friend, in your small groups, or in discussion after the service. Reflection is important because too often we hear a good sermon and soon forget it without actually growing spiritually or changing in attitude or what we do. The reflection questions are meant to be challenging, because our spiritual growth and the salvation of others is so important.*

- What does chapter 2 say about Job's character & faith? What might a testing of your faith reveal? Where do you see a need for spiritual growth in your life?
- What do we mean that Job's faith created his problem with suffering? What is the unique struggle in suffering for a God-fearing person?
- Have you experienced the blessings of a friend's presence, of Jesus' presence, when you had a struggle? How did it help you? Will you be that friend, that presence of Christ, for another? Who needs you now?