

Sunday January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022

**PRAYER:** Source of delight and rejoicing, you call us to assemble and partake of your banquet. The tables are spread with the abundance of your everlasting grace. Our cups overflow with the drink of new life. With Christ, our host, we join brothers and sisters to sing glad praises for all the wonders you have done. Amen.

**PASTORAL PRAYER:** Gracious and Glorious God, the one who is our inspiration and source of all truth; we acknowledge in this precious hour of worship your call to us to serve through your Holy Spirit. It is this same loving Spirit that empowers us to serve with a vast variety of gifts, experiences and relationships. O Loving God, your grace is the living water that refreshes our thirsty spirits and cleanses us of all impurities. Your presence is like a fine wine that enlivens us and gives cause to our celebration. Having been renewed by your grace and mercy and having been made whole by the truth that sets us free, we offer all that we are in obedience to Christ's call.

We give you our knowledge. It was your gift to us at creation, for you implanted within us the taste of inquiry and exploration. May what we have learned be used to sustain and dignify all of the expressions of life you have graced this world with? Help us we ask, to interpret to others the mysteries of our faith that we have probed and you have revealed to us. Grant us graceful words that are understandable to others, so that they may hear and respond to the call of your good news. Let us never, O God, treat the knowledge you have granted us as a personal possession, instead help us to put into action what we have learned. Endow us with a courage only you can grant to set challenging goals, and the energy and discipline to attain them.

Today and every day, we give you our ability to heal. May the Spirit of the living Christ continue to infuse us with compassion? May we always be responsive to those in need and sensitive to their unspoken cries for understanding and support? Give hope a name and a face as we move out toward the wounded in our world. Sharpen our vision to see not the overwhelming level of need in our world but the one soul in crisis within our easy reach. Help us to hear the moaning of our sister's and brother's unspoken prayers as your Holy Spirit does, so that we can offer our strength to those who feel weak, our voice to those who have no words left to say and our love to those who have spent all they have in the hopes of a better tomorrow.

We also want to give you our faith, which you have graciously given to us. It is through Christ that you taught us how to believe. By your Spirit's power we shall never forsake the quest for greater maturity in the Christian life. Make us eager to learn more of what it means to be Christ's faithful disciples. In all things guide us by your Holy Spirit, and make us instruments of your love and truth.

**BENEDICTION:** O God, as you are called a new name because of the life of Jesus Christ, we are called Christians because of our membership in Christ's church. Grant that, even as his words and deeds have brought glory to your name, our words and deeds shall bring glory to his name. Amen.

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Job 1:6-2:10  
“The Test”

An elderly man lay dying in his bed. While suffering agonies on his way to his final moment, he suddenly smells the aroma of his favourite scones wafting up the stairs. He gathered his remaining strength, and lifted himself from the bed. Leaning on the wall, he slowly made his way out of the bedroom, gripping the wall, he slowly makes it to the kitchen. There, piled on a tray are his favourite scones.

Was this heaven, or was it one final act of love from his devoted wife of sixty years, seeing to it that he left this world a happy man? Mustering one great final effort, he threw himself towards the table, landing on his knees in ruffled posture. His aged and withered hand trembled towards a scone at the edge of the table, when it was suddenly smacked by his wife with a wooden spoon... “oh no you don’t” she said, “they’re for the funeral”.

Whenever we face suffering, no matter what it is, the first thing we long for is comfort. If you have pain, you want pain relief. If you lose a loved one, you want them back. If you go broke, you want more money. Whatever deficit you are facing in what you consider a normal contented life, we want it filled to be comfortable. The portion of Job before us today, may shock us to the core, because first and foremost we learn that for God, our comfort is not his top priority.

Today the curtain is pulled back a bit, so we catch a glimpse of the inner workings of God’s court. Now some of the ideas I will pull from Job, especially today, may challenge you to rethink how you see God, the Satan, and even the world itself, but I think we can garner a much healthier view of life if we are brave to dive in. In all of this series, there is one thing we must remember above all else. It is, at its heart, a testing of Job, and likely our testing as well.

The truth we must garner here is that “The glory of God is more important than your or my comfort.” Perhaps intellectually we concur with this statement, but when the rubber meets the road, I am not so sure we agree. They are some pretty severe consequences to our faith, and our lives, if we believe that God’s glory is more important than our comfort. I almost guarantee that should we pursue this path; we may not like where it leads us.

In our first step in meeting the book of Job, we saw a portrayal of the world as many of us believe it is. The good prevail and even prosper, and the evil are punished. Job’s experience crushes that world view to a pulp, and that is the whole point of this passage. “There was a day” the bible says, and Job will never be the same. At first it seems normal enough. God is holding court and the “sons of God” are presenting themselves to the Lord.

Sons of God in this case, refers to supernatural beings created by God, something we might refer to as angels. The meaning of “present themselves” is akin to a cabinet meeting where each angel gives an accounting of their activities and observations. In Psalm 82 and 89 we see references to God’s council. Zechariah 6:5 has a similar portrayal as well. Out of this angelic group, only one member is mentioned. He is referred to as the Satan. Now we must be very careful here.

You may need to jettison your understanding of Satan to follow this portrayal.

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The Satan is not a name. Rather it is a title. It means something akin to “adversary, opponent, or enemy”. Interestingly enough, God himself is referred to as a Satan in Number 22:22. Here we read that in stopping Balaam, God was his adversary, or Satan. It is often assumed that Satan is evil, but he is not portrayed that way here; despite what happens to Job. He is also not a gate crasher to the counsel. There is no implied hostility toward the Satan from God.

“From where have you come”, is another way of saying. What is your report of your activities and observations? Read I Kings 22 for a beautiful picture of what is transpiring. In that passage we read that God sent out a “lying spirit” to do his will. Satan is there because he is expected to be there. His role roughly is akin to “her Majesty’s loyal opposition”. In our parliament, oppositions are needed keep the ruling party in good governance.

The images portrayed here are not literal. They are used because we can understand them. The picture here is of one true, absolute, supreme and sovereign God, who has no rivals. There is no other god like him. That being said though, we are led to understand that God doesn’t do everything and through his creative design, he assigns other supernatural beings to accomplish tasks. Some of these beings we may see as evil and malevolent, and we will see possibly why shortly. This is not a dualist portrayal as some religions believe.

God is sovereign, but other agencies are at work in this world. This is about governance, not fellowship. There is no hint that the Satan enjoys being in God’s presence, but it is his duty. The Satan reports that he has been “to and fro” over the earth. This is not aimless wandering, but rather a purposeful investigation. Satan is looking to see if there is anyone who is truly pious and godly on the earth.

This would suggest it was his job. God asks the Satan if he has noticed Job as a pious man. This is a bad thing for Job, isn’t it? God calls Job his servant. It is a recognition of Job’s loyalty to God, and his honour before God. The point of Job the book, becomes clear. This is not a book about suffering, but rather about how God treats his friends. Satan sees an opening and pushes back. It is his job, remember.

The Satan agrees that Job appears to love God and to be pious, but is this love sincere. Does he actually love God, simply because of who God is, or because he gets something from the piety? Namely all his wealth and privilege. Does God’s finest servant, his show piece of piety, really love God. The Satan then seals Job’s fate by suggesting that God has placed a hedge around him. Job worships God because of what he has, not because of who God is.

It appears Job really is living the prosperity gospel. Do everything right, and you will prosper. What comes next is not is not a wager as some call it. It is a test. A test of Job’s sincerity and love. “Stretch out your hand the Satan says, and he will curse you to your face. In other words, take away his prosperity, and he will forgo his devotion. Let’s be honest here. The Satan’s logic is downright perfect. The Satan challenges God to see if Job is truly pious.

Now we must be clear here. The Satan’s efforts are not based on malice. He has a job to do, as do all the angelic beings. God’s worthiness must be defended, even if it means we humans suffer terrible losses.

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As Peter writes in the New Testament. “You have been grieved by various trial, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that though perishable is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (I Pt.1:7) God is worthy of worship simply because he is God. God will be praised, his honour adored, and his honour seen by the universe, because Christian men and women have gone on worshipping him when all the blessings have been taken away.

The glory of God is more important than your, my, or Job’s comfort. That is the very heart of reality. God allows the Satan to do as he pleases, but not to take Job’s life. At first you think God will only go so far in proving the piety of Job, but if Job dies, the whole exercise is mute. It is further eye opening to realize that not one hair on Job’s head can be touched without God’s permission. Thus begins a terrible litany of troubles for Job.

First all his children, are celebrating one of their birthday celebrations. While this is occurring, a messenger arrives to tell Job that his oxen and donkeys were stolen and the servants tending them were killed, except for this one with the report. The protective hedge is breached. Job had hardly caught his breath when another messenger appears saying that lightning fell from the sky killing all the sheep and all the servants except the one who brought the report.

But the bad news continues, as another messenger arrives to report that another raiding party swooped in and stole the camels and killed the servants; all but the one to bring the report. Job is now bankrupted. He has been liquidated of all his assets. Well, the worse is over; but its not. Remember that birthday party his children were enjoying, well a great wind storm came and collapsed the house killing his children. How will Job respond to this awful news?

We are told Job rises, and in middle eastern fashion, he tears his robes, and shaves his head, and then falls on the ground worshipping God. “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.” Job knows he will die one day. God gives all the goodness, and it is God’s prerogative to take it all away. The story seems to conclude with the words “In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong”.

However, this is not the end of the story is it. Once again, the counsel in heaven is meeting and once again the Satan comes from going to and fro. Once again, Job is put forward as an example of unconditional love towards God. Not yet, the Satan objects. Job still has his health. Take that away, and he will surely curse you. God gives him permission, to strike Job’s health but not to take his life. Job is then infected with terrible sores,

In the other losses he faces, other agents were at work, like robbers, wind storm etc. Now the Satan gets personal, and goes directly at Job. The picture that emerges is designed to be provocative in a pitiable sense. Job has hit bottom. He sits in ashes, scrapping his sores with pottery shards. He has lost everything, but will he still worship God after God took away everything. But there is one more trial isn’t there.

Job’s wife comes, and sees the pitiable state of her husband. This the only time we will ever hear about her being in this story.

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She too is grieving the lost of her children. She too feels alone. Her life of luxury, influence, and whatever respect she garnered by being Job's wife, are all gone. So, what does she do out of her anguish? She chastises Job. Not out of malice, but out of her own pain. She sees this pitiful man, that she loved and admired become this shadow of what he once was. She begs him to forgo his integrity, and curse God and die. What has all the sacrifices gained you.

Just end this, and find peace in death. Job though, will not succumb, but in kindness says to his wife that her suggestion is not worthy of her. "Shall we receive good from God, and not receive evil?" The conclusion is powerful, "In all this Job did not sin with his lips". Job would not do as the Satan said he would, he has passed the test. But what an awful cost. Financial ruin, and so much death-children and servants.

As I mentioned at the beginning of today's message; the glory of God is more important than our comfort. Job reveals that for the glory of God there should be one person in this world who worships God because he is worthy of worship, and for no other reason. This is a critical moment in the story. This is the break between what Job has experienced, and the visit of his friends.

I should reiterate that Job is a book of extremes. One minute Job is on top of the world, and the next he is in a heap of ashes scraping boils, and all in a couple of days. For us, the question arises that as deep as our suffering is, it surely cannot come close to the overwhelming nature of Job's suffering. We have neither been as great as Job, nor likely as fallen. Neither have we been as happy or so alone, so rich or so poor and neither so pious.

This brings in the most critical point of all. Job actually does not foreshadow us, as much as the one who was truly blameless, in fact sinless, and suffered in spite of his sinless nature. Namely, Jesus. Jesus was degraded, beaten, and hung shamelessly on a cross, so Job's story is a foreshadow of Jesus' crushing suffering. But there is another critical lesson to learn here. Something Jesus said to Peter and in turn the other disciples.

"Simon, Simon, behold Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat." Just as Satan wanted to sift Job, he also wants to sift the apostles. Jesus says, "But I prayed for you that your faith may not be frail, and when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." (Luke 22:31) Peter in his own letter writes that trials are a necessary thing so that we are tested for our genuineness of faith. Do we love God for who he is, or just for what his gives to us.

Peter warned us that "Your adversary (Satan), prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour and he can be resisted only by faith." Paul tells us to put on the whole armour of God to withstand the schemes of the adversary. The book of Job is a very scary book. Its like a horror story. The truth is that Job's story is, and can be our story. It can be a personal horror story.

However, there is a big difference between Job and ourselves. A huge monumental difference. You and I, we live after the cross, and the fulfillment of Job's story. God has disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to shame, all through the cross of Christ. In John 1:3:8 we read that "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil."

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To make sure the accuser does not have the final word on any of us. The cross changed everything. In Revelations 12 we are told how the cross ended the Satan and the other accusers' place in God's council. That does not mean that the accuser is not still at work, but rather that because of Christ he is no longer in God's throne room accusing us. The issue of our justification is settled. There is no condemnation Paul says in Romans 8.

So, as we explore the story of Job, we are also exploring the story of Jesus. Satan still prowls around, looking to devour us. We still have to endure. As Revelations 13:10 says, we need to continue in endurance and faith. If we are Christ's, the Satan is no longer able to accuse us because he no longer has access to the throne of God. As Jesus said from the cross, "It is finished".

The story of Job just let's us know what exactly needed to be finished.