

Job 1

This morning we are going to listen to the first part of the story of Job. Some of you may know the story, others not. Most people have heard about, 'the sufferings of Job', or 'the patience of Job'. We bring ourselves and our own experiences to the story. So let's listen, and see what the story does to us. That is, let's listen for what God wants to show us or tell us, or call us to, or how God wants to reassure us or warn us.

I would like to read the first 12 verses, then, at the end of the message, the rest of the chapter.

Job 1:1-12 (in the reading that follows, I have edited a literal translation 'the accuser' for what most of our Bibles render as 'Satan'.)

¹ In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. ² He had seven sons and three daughters, ³ and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East.

⁴ His sons used to take turns holding feasts in their homes, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. ⁵ When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have them purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom.

Job's First Test

⁶ One day the angels ^[a] came to present themselves before the LORD, and 'the accuser' also came with them. ⁷The LORD said to 'the accuser', "Where have you come from?"

'The accuser' answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it."

⁸ Then the LORD said to 'the accuser', "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."

⁹ "Does Job fear God for nothing?" 'the accuser' replied. ¹⁰ "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. ¹¹ But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face."

¹² The LORD said to 'the accuser', "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger."

Then 'the accuser' went out from the presence of the LORD.

Parents who like Bible names for their children often choose names of characters they admire. And so, if they have a boy they might name him Isaiah, Joshua, David, Jonathan, Nathaniel, or Ezra. But not too many little boys are given the name 'Job'. Maybe that's because we think of Job and think of suffering. But the first thing to think of when we think of Job is his **character**.

That is what is highlighted about him. The narrator tells us that he is blameless and upright. The Lord tells us that Job is blameless and upright and later repeats that.

Job is solid. He loves the Lord with all his heart, soul, mind and strength, and he loves his neighbour. He trusts God in everything and is always thinking about how to obey. That is what 'feared' means here. And, he has nothing to do with any shady deals or crooked people. Job shuns evil.

It makes sense to us and it made sense four thousand years ago that Job was successful. The Lord loved and blessed Job.

Job is a human being. He is not sinless. And he is realistic about his children. He knows that his kids are not perfect either. So whenever they get together for one of their siblings' birthdays or 'feast days', Job prays for them. He knows that in the

excitement of a party those young people might do something dumb, or hurtful, or worse of all, they might curse God in their hearts. They might take God lightly. They might forget that the life they have is a gift from God. So Job prays for his children's faith. His hope is the hope of all parents who love and trust the Lord. He hopes that grace will get a hold of his children too.

He is blameless and upright. That is what we need to know about Job. And, we need to keep it in mind as we hear the story and listen in on all future conversations.

We meet the Lord in these verses. But did you expect to meet the Lord as a kind of foreman whose angels come to report on their travels? Did you expect to overhear conversations between the Lord and the accuser?

I am not used to thinking of the Lord this way

It is easy to be distracted by these things that surprise us. I was at first. But after living with this passage for a couple of weeks, those sorts of things fade away. What we are left with is the delight and joy that the Lord has in Job.

It is out of joy in Job that **the Lord draws him to the attention of the accuser.**

"Have you seen my servant Job?"

There is no one else on earth like him!

The Lord loves the way Job does business. Always completely honest and fair.

The Lord loves the way Job loves his children. The Lord loves those prayers that come on Job's kids' birthdays.

The Lord loves the way Job always remembered that all his success was a gift and blessing from God.

Job is rare in God's world. Genesis 6 tells us how much it hurts God to see people turn away from him to live their own lives. The more violent the world becomes, the more pain God feels in his heart.

The love that the Lord has for Job and the trust that Job has for the Lord is the heart of this entire story.

It is so easy to run right over this and get into the horrendous suffering and all the arguing and debating about it. But the heart of the story, and the key to understanding it, is right here. Job is a righteous man. The Lord loves Job and delights in him.

Love makes us vulnerable. Maybe love makes the Lord vulnerable too.

"Have you seen my servant Job?" (it is a term of endearment)

These words remind me of words spoken at Jesus' baptism, 'This is my son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased'. (I always thought of them as being addressed to the crowds, or to Jesus. In the context of Job, I wonder now who those words were for, especially if you recall the action of the accuser right after Jesus' baptism.)

When the angels, those ministering servants of God, come before the Lord, the accuser shows up too. We are used to thinking of the accuser as 'satan', but I'd like to stick with this term. 'Accuser'.

C.S Lewis says there are two mistakes we can make when it comes to the devil. The one is to think too much of the devil, the other is to think not at all. The book of Job reminds us of the reality of evil in the world and the presence of the accuser.

The accuser is as opposite from the Lord as it is possible to be. The Lord lives to bless and calls us to bless. The accuser is the finger pointer, and calls us to look for dirt on each other, and to destroy each other.

The accuser is the one who draws attention to sin.

The accuser starts whispering campaigns.

The accuser chisels into relationships of trust.

You will remember that it was the accuser who came to our first parents in the garden and said, 'did God really say.....?'. The Lord is over all, including the accuser. The accuser must give account to the Lord and is only able to operate within the freedom granted by the Lord.

The accuser sees the vulnerability of love as a soft target. And, when the Lord says, with joy and pride and confident love, 'have you seen my servant Job, there is no one else like him, blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil?', the accuser sees an opening.

It throws down the biggest, ugliest accusation in his black bag.

It says 'Job is playing you well.' Job knows how to behave so you will keep blessing him. 'Job is only in this for Job. Job knows that as long as he is a good little boy, you will keep blessing his life. Job is taking advantage of you! His godliness is really just a show, he doesn't mean any of it, he is just playing a game.

It is the accuser's ultimate challenge.

If what God is delighting in can be shown to be a terrible sin, then a great chasm of alienation stands between God and all righteous people that cannot be bridged. Then the godliest people are shown to be the biggest fakers and the most ungodly. God's only option then is to sweep the world away in judgment. **(NIV Study Bible p. 723)**

Those terrible words hang in the air. They must be answered. Not even destroying the accuser would take them away.

With deep pain for what Job will suffer, the Lord says, 'very well then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.'

Then the accuser went out from the presence of the Lord.

All this time Job and his family have been living their lives, going about their business. Job has been supervising his farm operations, observing his children's birthdays, praying for them, honouring and serving the Lord with his whole heart.

At the heart of this story is the relationship between the Lord and Job. Job delights in the Lord, he lives by faith in the invisible God, just as we do. He trusts that

God is fair and full of love. 'Gracious and compassionate, loving and faithful'. And, I hope it is clear, the Lord loves Job.

And now this ugly challenge has been thrown down. The accuser is only able to act within the permission of the Lord. 'All he has is in your hands...'

One day, completely out of the blue,

...we have had phone calls, or a knock on the door, completely out of the blue. You have had them. So have I. News of a death or a diagnosis, a betrayal or a loss. 'The business will not make it,' 'our spouse, our child, our parent...gone'. We never forget the small details of those days, where we were sitting, how we were between adding the cream and then sugar to our coffee when the phone rang.

One day, out of the blue, a special day, Job's oldest son's birthday actually a series of disasters rolled out onto Job. Let's listen now and hear what happened to him.

Read vs 13-22

¹³ One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, ¹⁴a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, ¹⁵ and the Sabeans attacked and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

¹⁶ **While he was still speaking**, another messenger came and said, "The fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

¹⁷ **While he was still speaking**, another messenger came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

¹⁸ **While he was still speaking**, yet another messenger came and said, "Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, ¹⁹ when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

²⁰ At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship ²¹ and said:

"Naked I came from my mother's womb,
and naked I will depart. ^[a]
The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away;
may the name of the LORD be praised."

²² In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

Job's response is inspiring. He has passed the first test. His faith is real and true. The Lord knows righteousness and a pure heart when he sees it. We might expect to go back to the throne room of the heavens and see the accuser slink away, mouth forever shut.

One of the things the story does to us is invite us to think about our own responses in those disaster times. Or, to wonder how we might respond if we lost everything in one terrible day. Those are questions to ponder.

But here is what I also wonder about. What was it like for the Lord to see this ugly violence wash over, 'this man he loved, 'no one else like him, 'my servant Job'?

The Lord be gracious to you.

The Lord be gracious to me.

And all God's people said, Amen.