

THE VOICE OF THE DEVIL: “DOES JOB FEAR GOD FOR NOTHING?”

(Job 1:1-2:10)

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For as long as I can remember, the Book of Job has been a part of my life. I did not recognize this fact until my father preached a sermon on Job when I was a teenager. I knew that my parents often quoted Scripture in their remarks to us kids; after all, it was fairly easy to distinguish King James English from everyday English. What I did not know until my father’s sermon was that so many of their household sayings came from the Book of Job. When my brother, my sister, and I were getting on my mother’s nerves—something we did quite well and quite often—she was apt to say, “miserable comforters are ye all”—Job’s words to his three friends who, in their efforts to help, only made matters worse (16:2). When my father had somehow avoided injury after some daring undertaking, he might express his thanks with words such as, “I am escaped with the skin of my teeth”—words borrowed from Job (19:20). And then, when I was a teenager and possessed all wisdom and all knowledge, my father often spoke to me using Job’s response to his know-it-all friends—“No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you” (12:2)—or my father might use God’s retort to the confident and conceited Elihu—“Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?” (38:2). To this very day, when I have been extremely busy and my mother asks me, “What have you been doing?” I answer with, “I’ve been ‘going to and fro on the earth’”—a statement from the opening chapters of Job (1:7; 2:2).

As I said in last Sunday’s sermon, three times in Scripture the Devil speaks, and as strange as this may sound, I want us to listen to the voice of the Devil and to hear what he has to say. We find his speech first in the third chapter of Genesis, then when we come to the Book of Job, and finally in the Gospels where he is tempting Jesus. In Genesis, the Devil is slandering God to man. In Job, he is slandering man to God. In the Gospels, he

is facing the God-man in the wilderness. Today's lesson will focus on the second of these three episodes. I ask you to open your Bibles to the beginning of the Book of Job.¹ Let's start reading at the first verse.

^{1:1}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. ²There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. ³He had seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred donkeys, and very many servants; so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east. ⁴His sons used to go and hold feasts in one another's houses in turn; and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. ⁵And when the feast days had run their course, Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, "It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." This is what Job always did.

⁶One day the heavenly beings² came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan³ [the Accuser] also came among them. ⁷The LORD said to Satan³ [the Accuser], "Where have you come from?" Satan³ [the Accuser] answered the LORD, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." ⁸The LORD said to Satan³ [the Accuser], "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." ⁹Then Satan³ [the Accuser] answered the LORD, "Does Job fear God for nothing? ¹⁰Have you not put a fence around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. ¹¹But stretch out your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face." ¹²The LORD said to Satan³ [the Accuser], "Very well, all that he has is in your power; only do not stretch out your hand against him!" So Satan³ [the Accuser] went out from the presence of the LORD.

¹³One day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in the eldest brother's house, ¹⁴a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were feeding beside them, ¹⁵and the Sabeans fell on them and carried them off, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; I alone have escaped to tell you." ¹⁶While he was still speaking, another came and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them; I alone have escaped to tell you." ¹⁷While he was still speaking, another came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three columns, made a raid on the camels and carried them off, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; I alone have escaped to tell you." ¹⁸While he was still speaking, another came and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house, ¹⁹and suddenly a great wind came across the desert, struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead; I alone have escaped to tell you."

²⁰Then Job arose, tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell on the ground and worshiped. ²¹He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I

return there; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”

²²In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong-doing.

^{2:1}One day the heavenly beings² came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan³ [the Accuser] also came among them to present himself before the LORD. ²The LORD said to Satan³ [the Accuser], “Where have you come from?” Satan³ [the Accuser] answered the LORD, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.” ³The LORD said to Satan³ [the Accuser], “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.” ⁴Then Satan³ [the Accuser] answered the LORD, “Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives. ⁴ ⁵But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.” ⁶The LORD said to Satan³ [the Accuser], “Very well, he is in your power; only spare his life.”

⁷So Satan³ [the Accuser] 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. ⁸Job took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and sat among the ashes.

⁹Then his wife said to him, “Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die.” ¹⁰But 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 (Job 1:2-2:10, NRSV).

Alfred Tennyson (English Poet, 1809-1892) called the Book of Job “The greatest poem of ancient and modern times.” G. K. Chesterton (English Author/Journalist, 1874-1936) wrote: “The Illiad is great because all life is a battle, the Odyssey because all life is a journey, the Book of Job because all life is a riddle.”

The Book of Job is full of mistakes. Job is mistaken in his belief that God is unfair and uncommunicative. Elihu is mistaken in his egotistical opinion that he is right and all others are wrong. Job’s three friends are mistaken in their assumption that Job’s sufferings are the outcome of his sins. Job’s wife is mistaken in concluding that when the material things are lost, all is lost. And Satan is mistaken in thinking that Job serves God only for what he can get.

The heavenly scenes of the first two chapters of Job are of supreme significance for understanding the story. *First, the goodness of God is affirmed.* “One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan [the Accuser] also came among them” (1:6; 2:1). The primary purpose of the heavenly assembly is to provide an open forum in which the Lord God permits the testing of Job. The plan to test Job was not the result of a shady deal struck in secret between the Lord and Satan; rather, it was

decided openly in the presence of the heavenly assembly. In this setting, God's motivation, based on His complete confidence in Job, is fully known and thus above question. We are enabled to see both the goodness of God and the goodness of Job. *Second, the power of God is affirmed.* The Lord says to Satan, "He [Job] still persists in his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to destroy him for no reason" (2:3). With these words, the Lord accepts full responsibility for Job's pitiful plight; He does not concede any of His authority to Satan. This point is crucial, for in the story to come Job will seek deliverance from God alone and rightly so, for he has no battle with Satan. This point also enables us to see why Satan does not reappear at the end of the story. When God decides to vindicate Job, Satan has no say whatsoever in the matter. The Devil can do nothing save what the Lord permits him to do.

It is in verses 9, 10, and 11 of chapter 1 that we hear the voice of the Devil:

⁹Then Satan³ [the Accuser] answered the LORD, "Does Job fear God for nothing?"

¹⁰Have you not put a fence around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. ¹¹But stretch out your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face" (NRSV).

Before we study the slander of Satan against Job, notice three incredible admissions that Satan makes. *First, Satan admits that God is good!* He confesses and then complains that God has in fact blessed Job. God has been good to Job. *Second, Satan admits that God is in control!* He accuses God of putting "a fence" around Job. Satan contests God's power and then challenges God to allow him to afflict Job. Satan is powerless without God's permission. *Third, Satan admits that Job is good!* He acknowledges that Job does in fact fear God. *But now comes the slander: Satan suggests that selfishness is the source of Job's righteousness.* Satan does not believe that faith in God can be sincere. For him, the fear of the Lord is a type of business venture in which a person agrees to be righteous if the Lord will provide the person with blessings. "Does Job fear God for nothing?" "Of course not," sneers Satan, "Job is a mercenary who is motivated by the bribery of God's blessings." According to Satan, the reason the righteous are pious is for profit. Take away the profit, and the piety will stop. Bring to an end the blessings, and Job the believer will become Job the blasphemer. That is the voice of the Devil.

The truth is, the result of Job's relationship with God was blessing: *blessing was the result and not the reason for the relationship*. Job did not fear God and live righteously because he was blessed; he was blessed because he feared God and lived righteously. The rest of the story shows this to be true and the Devil to be a liar in that Job remains faithful to God even when there are no blessings. "Does Job fear God for nothing?" The answer, contrary to the sniveling Satan, is a resounding "YES!" Job fears God even when there is no materialistic reason for him to do so. And although Job never receives a fully satisfying solution to his question as to why he, a righteous man, must suffer, Satan receives a clear and conclusive answer to his question, for it is a fact that Job's faith is sincere and steadfast. "Even if God kills me," declares Job, "yet will I trust in Him" (13:15).⁵ The Devil may have succeeded in deceiving humans about God—as we saw in last week's lesson—but he cannot deceive God about humans.

Over forty years ago, J. B. Phillips, in his book *Your God Is Too Small*, wrote:

[There are some] . . . people who see religion as a contract: they obey certain rules and God will faithfully look after them and their interests. These are people who write to the papers and say "if only" the nation would obey the Ten Commandments then God would grant victory, or rain, or fine weather, or whatever the need of the moment may be. They like everything cut-and-dried and even the Gospel is reduced to a formula; so that if you sign on the dotted line, so to speak, you are all right for Heaven!⁶

Throughout our land—in pulpits, on the television, over the radio—"the health and wealth gospel" is preached: believe and you will be blessed! For those who buy-in to this marketing message, Christianity becomes a contractual arrangement with God, a business transaction in which the convert invests his/her faith in exchange for health and wealth dividends. The promises of God become stock certificates by which you claim the blessings that are rightfully yours. Books, magazines, and journals offer strategic plans for attaining prosperity. Believe and you will be blessed! Pray and you will prosper! My friends, I ask you, is not this the voice of the Devil? Is not this an appeal to our selfishness? Are we being seduced to believe that believing will bring success? Are we being lured into a false sense of security that comes from equating prosperity with piety? Do we, like Job's wife, see material blessings as the only blessings that really count?

The gospel according to Job is that sincere faith and genuine righteousness are possible for human beings. Now that is good news! The gospel according to Job is that

the universe is under the sovereign control of a wise, holy, and loving God. Now that is good news! And this good and powerful God does in fact bless the righteous, but we must beware lest we reduce our relationship with God to a cut-and-dried formula. Faith, not formulas, will bear us through the tests of life. Contrary to Satan's slander of God to Adam and Eve, the righteous know that God is worthy of worship. And contrary to Satan's slander of Job to God, God knows those who belong to Him.

It seems to me that the central question of the Book of Job is: *Can faith survive in this world?* Job's faith did, and his story has a happy ending. What about you? What about me? How will our story end? Perhaps now is the time for a re-write by getting right with God.

¹This series of four lessons follows the format of G. Campbell Morgan, *The Voice of the Devil* (Baker). Helpful for its historical perspective is Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Prince of Darkness: Radical Evil and the Power of Good in History* (Cornell University Press, 1988). Concerning the problem of suffering, see John Mark Hicks, *Yet Will I Trust Him: Understanding God in a Suffering World* (College Press, 1999).

²Hebrew: "sons of God" (בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים - *bēnê hā-'ēlōhîm*).

³Hebrew: "the Satan" (הַשָּׂטָן - *ha-sāṭān*).

⁴Or "All that the man has he will give for his life."

⁵This verse may also be translated: "God might kill me, but I cannot wait. I am going to argue my case with Him" (cf. NLT, NRSV).

⁶J. B. Phillips, *Your God Is Too Small* (Macmillan, 1961), 57.