

Beyond a Frowning Providence

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[0 : 00] We'll be in the Old Testament a bit this morning and for the next couple of weeks. We'll spend some time looking at this character, looking at this figure called Job. And so we'll read the first 12 verses in the book of Job chapter 1.

And then we'll consider these words and the truth therein together. Job chapter 1. And we'll be reading from verse 1 through to verse 12.

Hear the word of the Lord. 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.

He had seven sons and three daughters and he owned 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen and 500 donkeys. And had a large number of servants.

He was the greatest man among all the people of the east. His sons used to hold feasts in their homes on their birthdays. And they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with him.

[1 : 05] When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would make arrangements for them to be 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. One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord and Satan also came with him. The Lord said to Satan, Where have you come from?

Satan answered the Lord, From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it. 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. Does Job fear God for nothing? Satan replied, 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 flock and herd are spread throughout the land. But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.

[2 : 08] Then the Lord said to Satan, Very well then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger. And then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.

This is the word of the Lord. Let's pray and ask God's blessing on our time in the scriptures. Our Father, we thank you for your word opened before us and we seek now, Lord, your blessing.

We ask now that by your Holy Spirit, Lord, you would speak to us, Lord. Impress these truths on our hearts. Grant us faith, Lord, and grant us insight, Lord. Open our eyes as the psalmists pray that we would see wonderful things in your word.

And bless us, O Lord. We pray and ask you these mercies in Jesus' name. Amen. And so we have the book of Job opened before us. We have the man Job presented to us.

And as we look at this book of Job, we see a figure that is fairly familiar, I would presume, in church and Christian context, in Christian circles.

[3 : 07] For those who have read the Bible, they've been exposed and they've seen and heard of this man Job, who had endured so much, who had endured such hardship and trial and difficulty.

But this morning what we want to do is we want to set him up. We want to get an introduction to him. Who is or who was this man Job? Now, in the book of Job, every major and significant reality of life is present, is covered.

We see, for example, in the book of Job, we have God present. We have Satan present. We have heaven spoken of. We have righteousness on earth being mentioned. Things such as evil and suffering, family, sin, worship, friends, questions about life, death, pain, sorrow, and a resolute commitment to the providence of God over the affairs of man and this world.

These are the grand themes that we see covered throughout these chapters of this particular book. The book of Job is a real-life book.

An honest and true book, uncompromising on its outlook on life. And you know what? When you consider the book of Job from a broader vantage point, what you see is that it covers every aspect of life.

[4 : 26] For instance, we see the perspective of heaven even as early as chapter 1. We also see the perspective of one suffering. And then we also see this perspective of those who are close to him, close to the one suffering.

And so we see various vantage points covered with these truths as we consider this book. As I survey the book of Job, I make these observations.

Our lives on earth are lived before the God of heaven. Heaven has an open plan view of our life in this entire world as it was.

We also see, as I make an observation, that Satan is a restless foe. Satan is a restless foe, relentless foe. We also note that bad things can happen to God's people.

Bad things can happen to God's people. But we also see one of the best responses to suffering is often silence. Silence.

[5 : 33] We also note in our observation that not everyone will understand when we experience trial and suffering. We also learn tests and counseling that we received, or at least the counseling that we received, ought to be discerned.

We ought to test the counseling that we receive as we see Job's friends come to him later on in the book and offer up words of counsel. But then we also learn that God always remains good.

God always remains good. And so I want to introduce the main character this morning and see these themes through his life. The main point of the book of Job is, Does Job serve God only because of what God has done for him, given to him?

Or does Job serve God out of reverence, fear, and truth? Which sets a question to us this morning. Are we, do we, serve God for what is in it?

Or for who is in it? And so I want to make three main points this morning as we look at this passage before us. Firstly, notice the character of Job. His outline, his character, his biography as it were, is given to us in the first five verses.

[6 : 54] And so we are introduced to the main protagonist here in the opening verses with these words, Now what is immediately clear is that Job stood out.

This man in the land of Uz was an outstanding figure. In fact, we are told in verse 3 that this man was the greatest of all people of the East.

He had everything. He had a reputable name. Now, now, just in case you run off and change your birth certificate name to Job, so you can have a reputable name.

The reference really there to the name is about his character. He had a good character. He had everything, a large and blessed family. Seven sons, three daughters.

We know that he was married because we read of his wife in chapter 2 verse 9. And not only did Job have a reputable name and a blessed family, but he was a wealthy man. He was a wealthy man.

[7 : 53] But these are the observations that we make about Job as we look at his biography. We see that Job lived in the pleasure of God. He lived to please the Lord.

The character description given of Job is even repeated by God to Satan in heaven. In chapter 1 verse 8, Imagine the testimony, or imagine we can live a life exhibiting such a testimony that it gets repeated by God in heaven to Satan.

And this is the character that Job had. This is the character of the man. One Bible teacher observes that there's four virtues that Job's biography tells us about him.

Firstly, Job's integrity. He was not perfect, but he was honest, sincere, true, authentic. He sought to live before God in an honorable sense. It wasn't the absence of sin in the life of Job.

No, he speaks about his sin. In Job chapter 13 verse 26, we read, Job says, The iniquities of my youth. He also says in chapter 14 verse 6, he specifically mentions my sin.

[9 : 14] This was not a sinless man, but a man that was honest, genuine, authentic, real, true. And he sought to live like that. And that pleased the Lord. We also see quickly Job's treatment of others in the word that he was upright.

That word upright captures his relationships and his dealings with others. Again, honest and fair in his dealings with people. In his family relationships, in his business dealings, in his walk with others, he was truly upright.

There was no crookedness in his dealings with people. He was straight with them. He could be trusted. He could be relied upon. Others could turn their backs without having to wonder whether he will turn on them.

This is what pleased the Lord. We also learn about Job's religion, of course. We read that he feared God. It means that he had a holy reverence for God.

He had a holy regard to the Lord. Job's faithfully, knowing that God was above him, beyond him, and there was a reverence and a fear of God and in God.

[10 : 23] Job feared the Lord, which is why when his children would have these feasts, his first concern was not whether they had a good time, but whether they offended God while they were having a good time.

We see his reverence for God, that even when his wife tells him after his excruciating pain that he endured, and his wife says, curse God and die, he rebukes and corrects her out of fear and reverence for God.

Job walked lowly before God, and this is what pleased the Lord. We also see Job's morality in these words, he turned away from evil. The moral person doesn't have to live in a sinless place, far removed from evil.

No, we can't do this in this fallen world that we live. However, a moral and godly person is known for turning away from evil. Firstly, evil is always threatening.

Wherever we find ourselves, there is moral compromise lurking. Secondly, there is a time and a choice and a responsibility upon us to make a decision in the face of evil, in the face of wickedness and immorality.

[11 : 36] And thirdly, Psalm 1 informs us and speaks to Job's life also, when it counsels us that blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of the sinner, nor sit in the seat of the scoffer.

So what does it mean to live a life pleasing before God? It means, as we see in Job, that we are living sincere, true, authentic lives. We are living upright and honest lives with others.

We are living in fear and irreverence to God, and we are living in such a way where we're turning our back on sin. This is what pleased the Lord. This is what garners commendation of God, by God.

Have you seen my servant Job? Not only do we see then Job's character, but we also see that Job's blessing. Job was rich in godliness, but he was also rich in possession and wealth.

When the author says that he was the greatest of all the people in the East, the meaning there includes his wealth and possessions. And this was not by chance. The Bible is clear, 1 Samuel 2, verse 7, The Lord makes poor and makes rich.

[12 : 47] Psalm 112, verse 3, Wealth and riches are in his house. 1 Chronicles 29, verse 12, Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all.

And so Job's blessing, Job's wealth, the possession that he had, also came from the Lord. Along with his character, along with his godliness, God also blessed him with wealth.

Even the devil knew that it was God that had blessed Job. When the devil tells God in chapter 1, verse 9, Well, you're the reason why he's in such a fortunate and prosperous condition.

Yet despite Job's blessing, he would experience intense suffering, pain, loss, and trial. And we learn that trouble, we learn that trial is not a respecter of person.

In this fallen world, no one is immune to suffering. In our walk with God, we may very well have to walk also through the valley of the shadow of death. And with the blessing of wealth might come the pain of loss and trouble in other areas of life.

[13 : 54] And so we see Job's character, we see Job's blessing. We also see Job cared for the honor of God. We are told that his children would have times of celebration, times of feasts.

And after these feasts, Job would be anxious and careful as to whether they displeased God. And in this we saw that Job had regard to preserve the honor of God in his family.

The firmness of his walk with God did not give him some false sense of complacency. Oh, I walk with God, I'm sure he will cut us some slack. Neither did his wealth and possession give him a false sense of importance.

I'm the greatest of people in the East, surely there's leniency for me. You see, with these strengths come an alternative weakness as well. Where with the strength of having this firm walk with God can come a sense of complacency.

Where with the strength of being so blessed and so prosperous by God can come the sense of over-importance. The sense of having an over-importance.

[15 : 00] But Job balanced these things quite well. These blessings that he had made him more responsive and responsible to God. And so he acted to preserve the honor of God. Job understood people are sinners and he understood God is holy.

He understood sin cannot be overlooked or disregarded. We see how he preserved the integrity, the holiness, the honor of God in how he cared for his children.

He acted to preserve the honor of God with great urgency. Notice, he rose up early in the morning to make sacrifice for them. He acted to preserve the honor of God with great diligence.

Offering burnt offerings according to their number. He acted to preserve the honor of God with great sensitivity. He observed and he wondered whether they have sinned in their hearts to God.

Their sin may not have been external, outward, but have they sinned in their hearts to God? If it is true that Job was the greatest of the people in the east of his time, it would also mean that he was known, he was popular, he was recognized by others.

[16 : 06] But notice, Job cared more about how his family's sins reflect on God than on himself. And so we are introduced to the character of Job.

But secondly, and very quickly, I want us to have an idea and get an appreciation for Job being weighed by God now. So from the character of God, we move to our second main point, the weighing of Job.

The weighing of Job. There's a time for everything under the sun, the preacher tells us in the book of Ecclesiastes. A time the Lord gives and a time the Lord takes away.

We cannot always draw a straight line from being godly to having a trouble-free life. In fact, that line may not go from godliness to a trouble-free life. That line may go from godliness to trouble, to trial, to testings.

And this is at least what we see in the life of Job. We learn, as we look at Job being weighed, we learn that there's no such thing as an untested faith.

[17 : 12] Trials not only build faith, they also reveal our faith. In this section, starting in verse 6, we are told, One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord.

And this is how Job's weighing begins. By being oblivious to the heavenly counsel being convened, and him living his life day to day, not knowing of the greater purposes and the mysterious workings of God's providence.

But we as the readers are given insight into heaven. The veil of heaven is just, for a minute, just peeled away, and we get to see through these words a heavenly counsel being convened.

So we see, this counsel is made up of angels, sons of God, and Satan, the adversary, or the accuser.

God is in such control, even here, that Satan's presence is not a threat in the slightest. In fact, it's welcomed. There is no fear from God, no panic, no concern, but he acknowledges Satan's presence, and engages him, and asks for a report from him.

[18 : 26] God is about to use the intentions of the devil for his good purposes. And this is one of the things we have to remember as we look at the story of Job, that that Joseph principle, if you remember the life of Joseph, that Joseph principle, that though you mean it for evil, God will work it for good.

Remember that Joseph principle. The devil, though vile, though the enemy of God, though destined for ultimate and eternal destruction and judgment, is still used of God.

The 16th century reformer Martin Luther called the devil God's devil, because he uses him for his own purposes. It appears that Satan's mission is to go back and forth through the whole earth, seeking whom he may devour.

He moves about to and fro, restless, relentless, foe is he. And so it appears his mission was to seek out the vulnerable, those whose hearts he can take captive, those whose hearts he can let astray.

And this is what he's doing in going to and fro. Peter says the devil is like a roaring lion, seeking whom he can devour. And God asks him, have you considered my servant Job?

[19 : 53] And it appears from Satan's response, that he had sniffed around Job. He had had a look at Job. He had considered Job, the Bible tells us.

So he had sniffed around God's servant Job, but concluded that Job is not at risk or vulnerable from turning away from God.

But Satan has a reason for why Job is not at risk. Notice verse 9. Does Job fear God for nothing? Satan replied, verse 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 flock and herds are spread throughout the land. And so Satan is very much persuaded that Job's position that he finds himself in is only because God had done this.

Because God had placed him in this place. But notice, Satan lives up to his title, the accuser, accusing Job of only showing faithfulness because of what God has done for him.

[21 : 00] What is happening is, Job is being weighed. And in life, we will be weighed. Our faith will be tested. And here we're getting an insight into the weighing of Job.

Notice, he's being weighed, not because there's some crisis or some sin unresolved in his life. No, he's being weighed even as he's living a faithful life before God.

It reminds me of James, when James speaks in his first chapter of his epistle, and he says, count it all joy when you fall into various kinds of trouble. And the idea behind fall is, it can happen so suddenly.

Where at one moment you are caring for your kids, ensuring that they don't sin against God, you're trying to live a responsible life by stewarding the blessings that God has given you. And as you go about living your faithful life before the face of God, at the same time, you can be weighed, tested.

And this is the case with Job. So there's nothing, there's no such thing as an untested faith. And trials do not only come to build faith, but also to reveal faith, which is why we read in 1 Peter 1, verse 6, So here, we see the test Job is experiencing.

[22 : 43] Does Job's faith in God depend on God's blessings toward him? That's the accusation of Satan. He's only serving you because you're blessing him. This is to some degree the looming question of cultural Christianity, or even cultural religion.

Are we only in it for what we can get out of it? Are we only in it for what we can get out of it? Satan scoffs at the piety of those who are only so because of the comfort and the convenience it can bring to their lives.

He's not bothered by those who serve God only for what he gives them. Because Satan knows, he's been around long enough to know that those things change.

God does not only give, but he also takes away. And if you're only serving him when he gives, Satan is, he's making a bet you will walk away when he takes.

We must be careful also in how we present God to others. Christianity is not a transactional religion. I come, God gives, he does, and it's a quid pro quo kind of, you know, I do and God gives me.

[24 : 01] No. It is a faith of absolute devotion to a God who is boundless in grace and infinitely worthy. Because he is, therefore we are and therefore we worship him.

Therefore we live our lives before him. Because he is. He is our creator. He is our God. He is our Lord. His blessings are incidental.

His blessings are not, his blessings are not the reason for why we come. The benefits we get because we turn to the Lord are not, you know, the foundational reason why we pursue him.

We love him. We are devoted to him because he is God. He created us and he calls us to live our lives before him. And so, is Job's heart with God or in what God has given?

The test is not only about our allegiance but also about our delight. It's not only about our allegiance but our delight. Who has your heart? Is Job's heart with God or in what God has given him?

[25 : 11] The believer has an unshakable joy in God. He understands that God is his treasure and his reward. You know, when you go back to God's dealings with the patriarch Abram, God promised Abram's descendants to be as numerous as the sand in the sea.

God promised Abram to give him a land or his descendants a land flowing with milk and honey. And yet, God prefaced his covenant promises to Abram with these words, I am your joy and your reward.

I am your joy and your reward. So it doesn't matter what changes, what we lose, what we experience, nothing is able to separate us from the love of God and that is our joy and he is our reward.

Again, Satan is not troubled by those whose heart are on material things. The possessions and the stuff of this world. In fact, he much preferred it to be that way.

He much preferred that earthly things be our treasure instead of God. We can even go as far as saying that our priorities align with the devil's if it is ultimately set on things, stuff, treasures of this world instead of he who created this world.

[26 : 32] What would happen? What would happen when God withdrew his blessings from Job? The big test Job had to experience and the important questions set before him as well as us is this, what would happen if God withdrew his blessings?

Job had lots of wealth, possessions, 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camel, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys. Can you imagine the size of the property you need to keep all of these animals?

We are told that he had many servants. We are told he had seven sons and three daughters. What happens if God takes everything away in a day? What happens if Job wakes up the next morning and nothing is left?

What happens that as Job goes by his day with his daily business, faithfully, faithfully plowing, faithfully giving himself to God and after every interval he receives news of a loss, of a suffering, of a trial, and of something that had come and just pierced his soul with news of devastation.

What happens? What happens then? Friends, these are not mere distant stories in biblical narratives, but they are realities.

[27 : 57] What would happen if God withdrew his blessing? This is the question that reveals the quality of our faith. Will your faith stand when everything falls away? So Satan makes a proposal. Stretch out your hand, he proposes to God.

Stretch out your hand and touch all that he has and he will curse you to your face. Stretch out your hand against her.

Stretch out your hand against him. and he will curse you to your face. That is the proposal that Satan makes and sets before God.

That is the weighing now of Job. And again, this, we can insert the word, this poor man is oblivious to what's going on. He's going about his day-to-day routine being faithful.

Being faithful. And so the proposal is set and we would hope that we can say with Job and we're going to do a bit of a spoiler alert but we can hope that we would say with Job as he says in chapter 1 verse 21, naked I came from my mother's womb and naked shall I return.

[29 : 12] The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. So we see Job's character, we see him being weighed and finally we see Job's preservation.

We'll get into his suffering and his loss next week, Lord willing. But for this week we just want to introduce Job, just set him up. Now as I glance at verse 13, one day, it begins with those two words if you're reading from the NIV, one day, as I glance at verse 13, and knowing what awaits Job, you anticipate the loss that is about to befall on this man, the devastation, the destruction, the suffering, the pain.

But before we go there, and we will go there next week, let us finish off this week by underscoring the important point here, the preservation of Job.

Notice firstly the implication in Satan's words in verse 9 to 11. Does Job fear you for nothing? You've put a hedge around him, you've blessed the work of his hand, but now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.

We notice the implication here, God protects Job, God preserves Job, God is keeping Job. Friends, think about that for a moment.

[30 : 32] Think about that for a moment, that even the devil knows this basic truth that God keeps his people. God keeps his people. Even the devil concedes that God keeps, preserves his people.

Now God not only preserved Job and placed a hedge around him by giving him things, God was actually preserving Job's heart also from these things. How is it possible to live such an upright life, sensitive to sin and in fear of the Lord when your life is filled with all of these blessings, gifts, material things and comfort?

It has to be the Lord's doing. God preserves our heart from the temptation of things. We also see God's preservation of Job as he instructs Satan in verse 12.

God permits Satan, gives him an opportunity to afflict Job. He says in verse 12, very well then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.

And then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord. God permits Satan, gives him instruction, an opportunity to afflict Job. The evil that will come upon Job is done by Satan.

[31 : 50] All that he has is in your hands. God must not be blamed for the evil works of Satan in this world. God though sets the parameters, the ground rules and says only against him do not stretch your hand.

It should be comforting that in the diabolical work of the devil, he is still only under God's limiting instructions. There's a mixed intention with our suffering, with our trial, with our afflictions.

Satan means it for evil. God means it for good. God does not only permit our suffering, but as we see in this heavenly council being convened, God also plans his purposes to prevail through our suffering.

As we conclude, the story of Job is about a resolute devotion to God that expresses itself in the day-to-day life of trials and trouble and suffering.

And it says this, we are not in it for what we get out of it. We are in it for who we get out of it. And even if we lose everything, we still have him.

[32 : 59] And even if he takes everything, he has still given us so much because he's given us himself. Friends, if God would give you nothing, if God would give you nothing, no earthly blessing, no material gift, no home, no food, no clothes, if God would give you nothing and only Christ, he would have given you more than you deserve.

And he has given us Christ. He has given us Christ. When he gave you Christ, he gave you the body of his Son broken for you.

The blood of his Son shed for you so that if you trust in Christ, you can be reconciled to God and placed on solid ground, placed on a sure foundation that whether the winds of life come, the waves of the storm of this world comes and intends and seeks to shake us, we are resolutely standing on the foundation of Christ himself given for us.

Understanding that this, or understanding this, means that we know nothing compares to the blessing, to the treasure, to the grace of our Savior. God does the taking, he brings the trial, he does the weighing because he cares for us.

He cares that our faith is true. And so, as he providentially works, and the works of his providence can appear bitter at times.

[34 : 39] Right? Providence is the term we use to capture the workings of God in our lives. And sometimes his working in our lives are bitter, are not sweet.

Sometimes his working in our lives are painful. Sometimes his working in our lives go beyond our comprehension where we don't even know why or what's going on. All we know is that it hurts. The English poet William Cowper, he speaks about the frowning providence of God.

The frowning providence of God. And then he says in his hymn, God works in mysterious ways. He says, behind the frowning providence he hides a smiling face.

And this is the face that we are left with when everything falls, to behold him. Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Thank you.