

## ***Disappointed with God***

Job 1:1, 2:1-10

Rev. Stephen H. Wilkins  
Georgetown Presbyterian Church  
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Today we begin a four-week study of the book of Job. I suspect that a good many of you are at least somewhat familiar with the story of Job. Job is a righteous man, possibly the most righteous man in the ancient world. Not only does he live according to the ways of God, he also intercedes daily with sacrifices on behalf of his children, just in case they have somehow transgressed God's law.

At the beginning of the book, we listen in on two encounters that Satan has with God. Satan at this point in the biblical narrative is not the tempter, nor has Satan fallen from the heavenly realms. Satan's role in the story of Job is that of the Accuser. His job is to roam the earth in search of people who have violated God's laws. In the conversation between God and Satan, God asks, "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."<sup>1</sup>

Satan scoffs at the notion. He implies that Job is righteous because he's always had it easy in life. Take away his comfort and his wealth, suggests Satan, and Job's faithfulness will evaporate. So God allows Satan to bring disaster after disaster upon Job—so that Job's livestock and his crops and his servants and his children were all taken from him.

Later on, as Satan comes to God to report on his work, God repeats his question to Satan: "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like hi; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason."<sup>2</sup>

Satan complains that Job remains faithful because his own health remains intact; take away Job's health, Satan suggests, and Job will curse God. Once again, God withdraws his protection from Job and allows Satan to attack Job's health. Painful sores cover Job's body from head to toe. Totally dejected, Job withdraws and sits in an ash heap. Job's wife, who has suffered all the loss Job has suffered (except for the skin sores) tells Job to get it over with—Curse God and die, she says.<sup>3</sup>

But Job refuses to curse God. "Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"<sup>4</sup>

The rest of the story consists of conversations that Job has with some friends who come to him in his affliction, and finally a conversation that Job has with God.

Before we go any farther in the story of Job, I want to address something that is, for most readers, a disturbing thought about God. In the first two chapters of Job, when Satan and God go back and forth about Job's righteousness and faith, it almost looks like God is playing games with Job's life. It almost seems as if God is goaded into making a capricious bet with Satan, and Job is the wager.

If this were the only communication to the human race about who God is, certainly we would be justified in rejecting such a God. But we have the whole body of Scripture that reveals a much larger picture of God. And in our Reformed Tradition, we have always adhered to the principle of allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture. And so this text must be read in light of the rest of scripture that tells us that God is the everlasting Creator of heaven and earth, gracious and compassionate, abounding in steadfast love; God does not treat us as our sins deserve; God is love; God is holy and righteous... In the light of the whole canon of Scripture, we have to believe that

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1 Job 1:8

2 Job 2:3

3 Job 2:9

4 Job 2:10

something else is going on here between Satan and God; God can't just be playing games with Job's life, just for the sake of winning a bet.

Philip Yancey comes at this dilemma, not from the perspective of putting God on trial, but from the perspective of true human freedom: Do human beings really have the capacity to choose God?

“Satan denied that human beings are truly free. We have freedom to descend, of course—Adam and all his descendants proved that. But freedom to ascend, to believe in God for no other reason than, well... for no reason at all? Can a person believe even when God appears to him as an enemy? Or is faith one more product of environment and circumstance? The opening chapters of Job expose Satan as the first great behaviorist: Job was conditioned to love God, [Satan] implied. Take away the rewards, and watch his faith crumble...”<sup>5</sup>

What about you? Why do you believe in God? Is it possible to believe in God even when God doesn't make sense?

The story of Job is the story of a man who wrestles with his faith in God when suddenly God doesn't make sense. Everything that Job had previously believed about God was being put to the test. Was God truly great and almighty? Was God faithful and just? Now that everything that Job had believed about God was in question, could God be trusted to do what was right and fair and good?

What do you do with God when God doesn't make sense?

What do you do when you're disappointed with the way God has let your life turn out?

By and large, life is somewhat predictable. Things in life usually happen according to principles of order. There are rules and laws—some of them natural, scientific laws, and some of them made by human design—rules and laws that dictate the way things are supposed to turn out. And for the most part, life works according to those laws and principles.

There are consequences, both positive and negative, for actions that we take: Diet and regular exercise will usually improve your health; getting caught robbing a bank will usually land you in jail for a long, long time; invest wisely, and your savings will grow; bring your children to Sunday school and church, and they'll generally turn out better for it; smoke a pack a day, and you're likely to have respiratory troubles; if you let your car run out of gas, it'll stop running; study hard in school and you'll do well... The list goes on and on. By and large, the world operates on principles of order that we can observe, understand, and even predict.

We tend to take a similar approach to our relationship with God. Do right by God, and God will treat you well. Disobey or transgress God's rules, and you'll get in trouble. Often we view our piety through the lens of a system of merits and rewards, transgressions and penalties. God is fair. Do what is right, and you will be rewarded; do what is wrong, and you're going to pay for it. Good or bad, you'll get what you deserve.

It's not the rules with which we have trouble; it's the exceptions. And the problem is there are way too many exceptions for us to ignore. Too many things happen that contradict logic and order.

Too many times bad things happen to good people, and we are slapped in the face with the reality that life isn't always so neat and tidy and predictable, that fairness doesn't always dictate the way things work out. What did the people of Indonesia do to deserve the death and destruction of the earthquake last week? What did the Samoans do to deserve being washed away by the tsunami that devastated their island? Why did someone you love get diagnosed with a malignancy? Or why did your dad come down with Alzheimer's? Or why was the baby born with AIDS or addicted to cocaine?

Too many times in life bad things happen to people who did nothing to deserve the bad things. Too many times we come to the realization that life is not so neat and tidy and predictable after all. And so we wonder, If

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5 Philip Yancey, *Disappointment with God*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), p. 192.

God is so great and powerful, and if God is so loving, then why do all these bad things happen? Maybe God isn't so great and powerful? Or maybe God isn't so loving as we first thought?

How do we have faith in God when God doesn't make sense? How do we have faith in God when we are disappointed with God?

There is in the second chapter of Job a very telling verse. When Job's wife suggests that Job curse God and die (and we shouldn't be too harsh on Mrs. Job, for her conclusion is one that many of us have considered), when Job's wife suggests that Job curse God and die, Job replies with this question: "Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"<sup>6</sup> And in his reply we find a challenge to examine the motive for our faith. Do we believe in God only for the good things that God can do for us? Or do we believe in God because God is God? What is our motivation for loving God?

Back in the 5<sup>th</sup> century Augustine differentiated between two different kinds of love. In Latin they are "Uti" love and "Frui" love. Uti love is love of use: I love money because I can use it to get something else I want. It's not that I love the money itself; rather, I love what money can do for me. That's uti love. Frui love is love of the object itself, regardless of what it can do for you. I love something just because I do.

Augustine noted that we have a habit of loving God with uti love—we love God because we hope we can use God to get what we want. That was what Satan thought when he dared God to take all of Job's comforts away—that Job would stop loving God. But God isn't interested in being used. That's not the basis on which God wants our love to be founded. God wants us to love God simply because God is God. God wants frui love from us.<sup>7</sup>

Why do you choose to love God? Should we accept the good from God, but not the trouble?

In just a few moments we will share in the Lord's Supper. The sacrament is, among other things, a remembrance that our Savior Jesus Christ died in our place on the cross. He took the brunt of evil and sin upon himself, for our sake. An innocent man died a death he did not deserve. To the unknowing mind, his death did not make sense. But we know that Jesus' death was not the end, for he was raised from the dead on the third day, and he lives today. His suffering was not senseless after all, for it was through his suffering that God redeemed us from ours.

When we share the bread and the cup, we acknowledge that our world is messy and confusing. But even though life doesn't always make sense, even though we face disappointment with the world and with God, nevertheless we also acknowledge that God redeems our suffering and makes us whole again. Not like we were before, but in a new way that only God can accomplish. When we share the bread and the cup, we acknowledge God doesn't take reality of pain and suffering away from us; instead, God comes to us in the midst of our sorrow and despair, and he transforms us and brings us healing that is beyond our ability.

God doesn't always make sense to us. I guess that's why we call it "faith" in the first place. Even when God doesn't make sense, are you willing to put your faith in him?

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6 Job 2:10

7 For this discussion of Augustine's use of the two types of love, see James Howell, "Why Bad Things Happen to Good People," July 21, 1996, [http://day1.org/890-why\\_bad\\_things\\_happen\\_to\\_good\\_people](http://day1.org/890-why_bad_things_happen_to_good_people)