

Job-Faith Facing Facts

by Andrew Davies

The book of Job teaches us to face reality, be honest with ourselves, and live a life of consistency and humility in order to understand the sufferings of the godly and the righteousness of God.

Duration: 1:18:19

Scripture: Job 42, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Job"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the book of Job and its themes of the sufferings of the godly and the goodness of God. The sermon is divided into four sections, with this session covering chapters 1 and 2. The preacher highlights Job's response to his immense suffering, showing that instead of stoicism or complaining, Job falls before God and worships. Despite the successive blows and the seemingly inexplicable disasters, Job remains faithful and acknowledges God's sovereignty.

Transcript

Well, thank you for those words of welcome to the Davis tribe. We are coming back to Wales, as you say. I remember coming to the conference when I was 16 years of age, when it used to be held down in the Methodist church, down the road, and being thrilled as a young boy by those great addresses of Dr. Jim Packers on the book of Zechariah, on revival, and then again on Romans chapter 8, and it seemed to me at the time to be a touch of heaven.

And those themes that he raised, themes of revival, and the glorious privileges that we enjoy as Christians are, seems to me, the great themes that we ought to be striking at the present time in the church. I well remember sitting at the back, scribbling furiously, with my little notebook, trying to catch every word he said, and I still got those notes, and have often referred back to them with profit. It's lovely to know that there are young people today coming into the kingdom, and are here in the conference, and my prayer for you is that God would not only save you, but also use you, make you his servants, that you might also glorify his name in the preaching of the gospel, and in the witness to the Lord Jesus Christ.

So it is a joy to be here, though I'd much rather be sitting at the back than standing here at the front. Well, I want us to look at the book of Job. The book of Job.

Now, it's a big book, I appreciate, but I think it is possible for us during these four morning sessions to look at it not only from the bird's eye point of view, but also perhaps in a little more depth. And let me begin by

asking the obvious question, and that is, why should we study a book like this at the English conference? The answer must be obvious. We are living in a suffering world, and though many of us are the Lord's people, we are not immune from suffering.

It's a beautiful world. Despite the rain yesterday, we've awoken this morning to a lovely summer's day in Aberystwyth, and the sea captivates us, doesn't it? We live in a lovely world, but it's also a dark world, the world of pain and sickness and disease and death. We're all involved in that.

Many of you are young people, but you're not too young to die, and you're not too young to experience bereavement and sadness. Many of us are older, and we may already have begun to experience those things. So, we have to face facts.

If we can't face facts, if our Christian faith doesn't enable us to face reality, then it's mere wishful thinking. And the fact that we are presented with in the book of Job is the fact of the sufferings of the godly. C.S. Lewis wrote a book called *The Problem of Pain*, in which he talked about pain in general.

But the problem in the book of Job, if you like, is not that of pain in general, it's pain in the godly. Why is it that godly people suffer? That's the problem, and of course it's directly related to the righteousness and the goodness of God. Why does God allow Christian people, his own people, to suffer? It's obvious from the opening verses of this chapter that Job was a godly man.

He enjoyed great prosperity for a while, but not for ever. He found himself before long severely afflicted, and his anguish can be put like this. Job was really asking this question.

Am I the object of God's anger? Is God punishing me? If so, how can God be just and good, since I have sought to live for his glory and his praise? How are we to explain the fact that such a man as this was allowed to suffer in such a way? To put it in theological terms, many people today are interested in a theology of healing. What about a theology of suffering? I remember reading a few years ago in, I think it was the *Banner of Truth* magazine, some very moving words from a missionary in South America whose wife and daughter had died. And somebody asked him, how do you explain the death of your wife and daughter? You a Christian man.

Is God good? And his reply was this, the miracle is not that God allows us to die, but that God allows us to live. We seem to expect so much of God. We seem to think that we are somehow or another immune from suffering and pain, but we are not.

So this is a great issue for us all. Whether you're young and haven't yet begun to experience these things, you will. And whether you're older and have already begun to, then perhaps these words will be words of comfort and help, and I think also words of encouragement, that they might arm us for battle.

Because after all, the purpose of the preaching of the gospel is not merely to cause us to enjoy the Word of God, it is that, to feed our souls, it is that. But surely the purpose of preaching is to arm us for battle, to prepare us to fight. And we are involved in a tremendous conflict, as individuals and as a church, as I hope to show.

Well, there are several lines of approach in the book, in its attempt to answer this basic fundamental problem of the sufferings of the godly and the righteousness of God. And each line of approach is a development of the fundamental answer, namely, that God is God, and man is man. That really is what the book is saying to us.

Man is limited, he's finite, he sees only a tiny section of the whole picture, he grasps only one or two threads in the divine tapestry. So we must be careful when we look at the sufferings of the godly, to suspend our judgment, to humble ourselves, and to know our place. Man's greatest sin has always been pride.

It was the sin of Satan, it was the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden. When we are faced with God and his inscrutable ways, we are to confess our ignorance and bow in worship. That really is the fundamental line of approach which the book of Job puts before us.

But having said that, God has also chosen to reveal certain things to us about suffering. He hasn't revealed the whole picture, but he's revealed certain things to us, and we have shafts of light upon this problem here in this wonderful book. Now we are not sure exactly when Job lived.

It may be that he lived during the time of the patriarchs, the fathers. There is a good case to be argued for that. We are not sure either when the book was written.

Most commentators believe that it was written during the time of Solomon, because it seems to have certain features which are characteristic of the so-called wisdom literature in the Bible. Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and so on. But when we look at the book, there is obviously a very clear structure to it.

Let me just outline the structure to you, so that what I have to say fits into the overall context. In chapters one and two, for example the opening chapters, we have here Job presented to us as a godly man. We have a description of his life and character, and then of his sufferings.

And these two chapters are written in prose. Then if you go to the back of the book, you will find that at the end of chapter 42, verses 7 to the end, we have the record of Job being restored to his former prosperity, and indeed additional prosperity given to him. And that section also is in prose.

So here we have two descriptive sections in the book, the beginning and the end. And they're both written in prose. They clearly describe the actual events in the life of a real man.

Job was a real man. This book is not a myth, it's not a story as it were without any historical foundation. It's a real story.

Ezekiel speaks about Job, and we know from the New Testament that James in his letter refers to the patience, the steadfastness of Job. So the introductory chapters and the concluding verses are in prose and record certain events in the life of this man. But the rest of the book, the whole main section is in poetry, running from chapter three to chapter 42, verse 6. And here this theme of the sufferings of the godly is worked out.

The question is, why does God allow the godly to suffer? And that theme is developed in three main sections in poetry. Chapters 3 to 31 describe a dialogue which Job's three friends, his so-called comforters, have with him. And in these chapters there are three cycles or groups of speeches from Job's three friends.

The first cycle of speeches which follows Job's cry of anguish in chapter 3 are in chapters 4 to 14. And there we have first of all the first speech of Eliphaz and Job's reply, then the first speech of Bildad and Job's reply, and then the first speech of Zophar and Job's reply. Then there is a second cycle of speeches in which these three individuals again present a case to Job, and Job replies to them in turn.

And those chapters occupy 15 to 21. And then there is a third cycle of speeches in which Eliphaz and Bildad speak, Job replies, but Zophar, the third friend, is silent. And the concluding chapters of this section, chapters 27 to 31, contain Job's final reply to his three friends.

So that's the first main poetic section in the book, the debate, the dialogue if you like, between Job's three friends and Job himself. And then the second main section of poetry runs from chapter 32 to 37. And these contain the speeches of Elihu, who is a young man and he dissociates himself from his three friends, and speaks to Job in such a way as to make Job speechless.

Job has nothing to say in reply to Elihu. And after the speeches of Elihu, chapters 32 to 37, we have the final third main section in poetry, running from chapter 38 to chapter 42 verse 6, where the Lord himself addresses Job. We call these the storm speeches of Jehovah.

And they bring Job to his knees. He repents of his murmurings, of his self-righteousness, and of his pride, of his words without knowledge about God. He abhors himself in dust and ashes, and sees that even his afflictions are benefits, and that God, though inscrutable in wisdom and power, is also good and kind.

Those are the main poetic sections in the book. And what I propose to do during these four morning sessions is simply to divide the book into four sections, obviously I have to do that. And we'll look this morning at chapters one and two, tomorrow morning at chapters three to thirty one, the debate between Job and his three friends, and on Thursday morning at the speeches of Elihu, finally the storm speeches of the Lord, and the concluding verses of the book.

So we'll turn this morning to these opening chapters. And the themes I say is the sufferings of the godly and the goodness of God. Notice in chapter one, first of all the challenge of a godly man, a godly man.

There was a man in the land of whose whose name was Job, and that man was perfect and upright, one that feared God and eschewed or turned away from evil. There's one thing that is needed today in the world and in the church, it is godly people, godly people. We are told in the scriptures that we are redeemed and bought by the precious blood of Christ to be conformed to the image of God's Son.

That is why Christ died for us. What is godliness? Perhaps before asking what it is, we should ask what it is not. You will notice that there is nothing here about Job's family or about his background.

We are not told about his pedigree. And that immediately reminds us that our family background, our pedigree, does not make us godly. The fact that you may have been born into a Christian home doesn't make you a Christian.

I was born into a Christian home, but that didn't make me a Christian. I thank God for my home. I thank God for the prayers and the influence of my mother and my father.

But that wasn't enough. You know it's dangerous isn't it sometimes, particularly when we are young people, brought up in a Christian atmosphere and environment, to assume that we are Christians. Perhaps we've been taught certain things.

Sunday school level, from our own parents, we've been used to hearing the word of God preached. And we hear these things and we are familiar with the sound and we imagine that we know those things with which we are familiar. But that isn't enough.

And I think we've got to be honest with ourselves. I will remember the day when I had to be honest with myself. I used to attend the church prayer meeting.

I used to pray in the prayer meeting. And one evening coming out of the vestry at the mission hall in Neath, the young lady said to me, well Andrew, she said, when were you converted? And I didn't know what to say. I was speechless.

I realized that I had assumed that because I was in a Christian church and my mother and father were Christians and I was partaking in prayer at the prayer meeting, I had assumed that I was a Christian. Now it's very difficult to say when God begins to put life in you, I appreciate that. But that question pulled me up short.

We must be honest with ourselves. We have to really face the fact. It isn't our family background.

It isn't our pedigree. It isn't the environment in which we are brought up that makes us Christians. That isn't godliness, however valuable it may be.

We are not told here anything about whether Job went through any elaborate forms of observance, religious ceremony. We're not told whether he fasted on certain days. These things may be of value and indeed are of value.

But again, these are not the things that make you godly. You can dress an unregenerate man up. You can make him look like a Christian.

But he can remain all the time an unregenerate man. This is not godliness. And we must be aware of it.

You see it's possible isn't it to come to a conference like this and to enjoy the conference. It's possible as young people to enjoy each other's company and each other's fellowship and to see one another again. To go through the camps and wonderful they are and it's lovely to see one another.

And to assume that because we've done all that we are Christians. But we can't assume it. Godliness does not consist of our religious background, our pedigree, our family or our environment.

Well then, if it isn't that, what is it? Well we are told here about Job that he was a blameless man. That really is the translation of the word perfect in verse one. He was blameless.

The word means consistent. He was the same wherever he was. Job wasn't one thing in the house of God and another thing in the office, if you want to use modern language.

Job wasn't one thing in his private devotions and another thing in the classroom. He was a consistent man. He was the same at home and at work.

Godliness means being consistent. It means being the same wherever we are. It's a very easy thing to be godly in a place like this.

But we are meant to be godly in the office, in the school, in the camp. We are meant to be godly wherever we are. We are meant to be godly in our speech, in our attitudes, in our conduct.

Godliness is not something that we put on. It's not a pose. It's not an artificial thing.

Godliness is an inward characteristic of the heart that shows itself in your life. And this man was consistent. He was the same.

Let me ask you, my friend, are you the same in your home as you are in this building? Are you the same in the young people's camp as you are in your church? Am I the same in my own home as I am in the pulpit? Are we consistently godly? This is the challenge that comes to us from Job. What are we like on our own? What are we like in our own room when nobody's there? What do we write about in our diaries? What do we talk about with our friends? Are we really godly? What do we say in our letters to one another? What do we talk about? We say we're Christians but are we? Are we consistent? Job was a consistently godly man and we are meant to be like that. We are meant to be the same wherever we are and whatever we are doing.

And he was also upright. That's really the second thing that we notice about his godliness. He was sincere, upright.

He was an honest man. He wasn't a pretender. He wasn't like Ananias and Sapphira, you remember, who pretended.

I shall never forget as long as I live a sermon that my own father preached on Ananias and Sapphira. As a young man I was very interested in athletics and had been competing in the Welsh Athletics Championships, I remember, in Cardiff. I hadn't been in the Saturday night prayer meeting and I was beginning to find that sport was occupying my attention more than the things of the spirit.

And in the Friday night meeting prior to that athletics championship we were discussing the Apostles' Creed and because I'd been to a Christian school I happened to know the Apostles' Creed and I'd recited it at that Friday night meeting. Then the athletics championship on the Saturday and then Sunday night, Ananias and Sapphira. My father spoke about people who knew the Apostles' Creed, talk about direct preaching, people who knew the Apostles' Creed and who could recite it, but who were finding that their interests were much more in the things of the world than in the things of the spirit.

And I can remember going out of that church feeling angry. I went home and thought and as I thought my anger turned to remorse and my remorse to repentance and I asked God to have mercy upon me. I didn't want to pretend, you see.

I thanked God for that suffering. It went right to my conscience. It woke me up and we need preaching to wake us up, to stir us to the depths of our souls so that we don't act.

Don't act Christianity, dear friend. Be a Christian. We are not meant to put on a pose.

We are meant to be what we are, to be straight and sincere and real before God. Joel was such a man, upright, sincere. You will notice also that he feared God.

That's the secret of godliness, isn't it? He feared God. He knew that God's eye was upon him wherever he was. Are we aware of that, I wonder today? Our forefathers were, weren't they? Alas, if you now go to Trebekah and to the family home which Howard Harris built there, you will no longer find that great eye that was painted in the ceiling.

But those of us perhaps who are a little older and visited Trebekah years ago will remember it. In that room they had a great eye painted on the ceiling to remind them that what they were doing there in that

place in that family was under the eye of God. They feared God.

Are we God-fearing men and women? That's the test. Are we aware of God wherever we are, whatever we are doing? We can deceive others but we can't deceive him. So what is our response and our attitude to God? Are we enjoying God? Do we pray? Are we a people who go into our closet and shut the door? Do we love the prayer meeting? Do we fear God? This is the secret of godliness, seeing God and measuring everything in the light of God's character and being so that wherever we are, whatever we are doing, we see him and fear him.

He feared God and he turned away from evil. I want to emphasize that because there is a negative here. He feared God and turned away from evil.

We must do that. It is not only that we seek to fear and love and honor God but if we do that we shall also be a people who turn away from evil. You can't know God and flirt with evil.

You can't have the spirit of God within you without being conscience stricken when you are in sin. There is this spirit of life within us and if the spirit of life is within you, even though you may have backslidden, there is something in you that makes you shrink from evil. There is that element of life and godliness within every true Christian that makes us recoil from evil and that's right.

It's right that we should. If I as a fisherman and I'm very keen on fishing, particularly trout fishing, if I as a fisherman see a fish traveling downstream on its back, then I conclude about it that it's dead. But if I see a fish swimming against the current, I know it's alive.

But we are not meant to be as those who flow down the current with the world on our backs. We are meant to be living, resisting people, people who see the world and the evil in the world and who recoil from it, not only outwardly but inwardly in our heart. Let me ask you, many of you are young people, and I want to say this to you.

Do you avoid evil? What books do you read? What magazines? What films do you watch? What sort of parties do you go to? What are you really interested in? Do you avoid situations and sources of temptation? Do you turn away from evil? That's part of godliness, do you see? The godly man sees sin, he sees evil and he turns from it. We need to remember, to use the analogy of fishing again, that at the end of that line is a hook and behind the line is a fisherman. And the fisherman is the devil.

And the devil knows the right bait for the right person at the right time. And he knows how to simulate real pleasure. And he can make the pleasures of the world appear so attractive and so real and authentic.

But we need to remember that the pleasures in the world, the sinful pleasures of the world I'm talking about, are ultimately, if we are not careful, going to destroy us. Think of yourself for a moment, if you like, as a fish. That may be difficult, but it's not difficult for me as a trout fisherman.

There you are. You're a fish in the river. You're in your natural environment.

And all of a sudden you see this lovely artificial fly passing. You don't think it's artificial, it looks very real to you. You don't see the line, you don't see the hook, you don't see the fisherman who's hidden on the bank.

There you are in midstream. You know, here we are as human beings in the world. The world is our natural environment.

And the world, like the river, can make that temptation look very appealing, very alluring, look so much like the real thing. The fisherman comes on the river accentuating and increasing the size of that artificial bait. So here we are in the world, in our natural environment, and we see temptations to sin.

What do we do? Well, we are to resist them steadfastly. Yield not to temptation, is the children's hymn. Yield not to temptation.

To see the temptation isn't sinful, but to begin to move, like that trout, to begin to move towards it. Then we are in slippery places. Then we are in danger.

Then we are likely to be hooked. What we don't realize very often is that behind the sources of the situations of temptation which are made so appealing by the world in which we live is this great enemy of our souls. The devil, the expert fisherman who knows exactly what suits you and me and when to use the bait at the right time.

We are to avoid it. We are to shrink from all sources of evil. So there is the challenge of a godly man.

I find that it is something that helps me as I think about my own life in the world at the present time. To put it in New Testament language, be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Yield your members as instruments of righteousness to God and do not yield them to sin.

Present your bodies as living sacrifices to God which is our spiritual worship. Godliness. May God make of you and me really godly people in this present evil world.

But then notice about Job's godliness, how it expressed itself. We've seen what it is. But how did it express itself? It must do that of course.

Well it didn't express itself in any artificial pose, in any acting, but it expressed itself in in his whole way of life. Just like clothes. Clothes are a way of expressing ourselves aren't they? The way we dress tells us something about us.

If we are slovenly people by nature and by temperament, then probably we'll dress in a slovenly way. But if we are concerned about neatness and order, then we shall probably dress in a neat and orderly way. If we are vain, we shall undoubtedly dress in a vain way, so that we want to draw attention to ourselves in the wrong way.

Clothes are a way of expressing ourselves. But there are two particular ways in which Job's godliness expressed itself. It expressed itself in his family life.

We read, don't we, in verses four and five about his sons, his seven sons and three daughters, that they would eat in each other's homes on each of the seven days of the week. Each of the son's homes that is, and the the daughters, the sisters were invited along to the home of each of these sons. So there they were, they were a very happy close family.

They ate and drank together. It's a close family. Job saw that and no doubt he was glad about it, but he saw two dangers.

The first danger was the danger of his children sinning. And when you begin to eat and to drink together, and when you begin to enjoy yourself in that sort of convivial atmosphere, it is a very easy thing to sin. To sin with a lip.

It's a very easy thing to be irreverent. For humor, which is perfectly legitimate and perfectly healthy, to become illegitimate and unhealthy. Now Job knew that.

He knew that people who eat and drink together, which is a perfectly happy and legitimate form of pleasure, are in danger of letting their instincts govern their spirit. So because there was this danger of sin, he did something for his children. That was the first danger he saw.

And the second danger was that they might curse God, that they might forget God, if you like. Isn't that something we can easily do? If we are enjoying the pleasures of this life, which is perfectly right, we have to be very careful lest we forget God. Lest God, as it were, is squeezed slowly and gradually out of the situation.

Now Job saw the dangers in this close family relationship that existed with the sons and the daughters meeting together to eat and to drink and to talk and to enjoy one another's company. He saw the danger of sin and of cursing God. Let me ask you, if you were a parent, what is your greatest desire for your son or daughter? Your greatest desire? You want them to succeed in life? That's good.

Pass their exams? Well, fair enough, if they're capable of it. You want them to marry well? To have a home and a family? Well, that's all very good. So do I, as a father.

But what is our greatest desire for our children? Is it not that they should be godly? Is it not that they should be children of God and go to heaven? However successful they may be in this world, is your greatest desire not that they should be Christ's and should love Christ and honor Christ and serve Christ? I think we have to be careful, even as evangelicals, lest we get into the treacherous situation of wanting the best for our children in the worldly sense and forgetting their eternal spiritual health. My greatest desire for my children is that they might know and serve the Lord and be with Him in the glory that is to come. Job was concerned about that, and I'm sure that we are too, if we are parents.

And Job expressed this by sanctifying his family. I'm sure that means that he prayed for them. He was a realist.

We read in verse 5 that every day, or at least at the end of the feasting period, Job sent and sanctified them and rose early in the morning. He wanted them to be separate. He prayed for them.

He wanted them to be clean. He also offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all. He wanted them to be under the blood of atonement.

He wanted them to know the sprinkling of blood upon their consciences. The only safe place for our children is Calvary. That's the only safe place, dear friends, beneath the cross of Jesus.

You may be child of a Christian home, and you're not yet beneath the cross of Jesus. Why not? Why not? Your mother and your father are concerned about you, that you should come under the canopy of His precious blood. But we want more than their success.

We want them to be godly and to be cleansed from their sin. And so Job's godliness expressed itself in the family, and then it expressed itself also in society in general. We read of his substance, his great substance in verse 3, and later on in the same book we read of his influence in society.

So here is a godly man whose godliness is expressed in outward circumstances, in home, in society, and he is known as a godly man wherever he is and whatever he is doing. A challenge of his godliness. But then I want you to notice, secondly, the mystery of providence.

And here we begin to enter very deep water. Job for a while prospered. We read about his prosperity later on in chapter 29.

Having a good family life, having wealth and influence in society, having gifts from God to use. God entrusts godly people with gifts and with blessings. And that's part of the mystery of providence.

We need to be able to cope with prosperity, don't we? We need to know how to handle wealth, and health, and influence. We need to know how to be humble and generous when God blesses us in these particular ways. But then there is another side to the mystery of providence.

The same God who had given Job all these blessings is also the God who allows Job to be deprived of these blessings and who allows him to suffer. And suddenly, almost overnight, his whole situation changes and successive disasters creep over him. Now, the important thing to do is to notice at this point the hand of Satan in this whole matter.

Because we are given a glimpse behind the scenes here that is invaluable and important. We read that one day when the sons of God, the angels, came to present themselves before the Lord, Satan came also among them. And the Lord said to Satan, where comest thou? And Satan said to the Lord, from going to and fro in the earth and from walking up and down in it.

And the Lord said to Satan, hast thou considered my servant Job? There is none like him in the earth, the perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and departeth from evil. So here we have God's own testimony that Job is a godly man. That's important because of what will follow.

But notice that Satan has to give an account to God of what he's been doing. He is summoned. He has to appear before the presence of the majesty on high.

He is a servant of God, Satan. We know that the angels are ministering spirits. We know that they are servants of God and are sent to do his bidding and they do it willingly.

But have you ever thought of the fact that Satan is also the servant of God and that he is obliged to answer the summons of the great creator whenever that summons is given. Satan has to appear with the sons of God at that great throne in heaven. He is an unwilling servant, I know.

He doesn't like the other angels gladly and spontaneously obey the will of God. But nevertheless, he is under God's authority and he, though unwillingly, has to submit to that authority. Do you remember these words from the book of Jude? The angels that did not keep their own position but left their proper dwellings have been kept by him in eternal chains in the nether gloom until the judgment of the great day.

The angels who fell, kept by God in eternal chains in the nether gloom until the judgment of the great day. They are chained. They have some freedom, some ability to move, but they are under the authority of God.

They are subordinate. They are subject to God. Not only Satan but the whole realm of evil and of evil spirits.

They are only allowed to do what God permits them to do. And it's God who issues the challenge. It's God who says, where do you come from? It's Satan who has to reply.

It's God who says, have you considered my servant Job? It's Satan who has to reply. God, as it were, is issuing the challenge. He is in control.

And Satan has to give an account to God of all that he is doing. And he is bound to reply. And then this enemy, Satan, is a restless, unrelenting enemy.

He is described as one going to and through in the earth and walking up and down in it. Have you ever seen a tiger in a cage? Just before feeding time, have you seen an animal prancing from one part of a cage to the other with an eye upon you, eager, restless, assiduous, hungry? It's a picture of Satan. He wants to disrupt the work of God.

He goes to and fro throughout the whole earth. He is intent upon disturbing God's people. And he has many servants with which to help him.

Here he is, this restless, assiduous, unrelenting enemy that you and I are constantly having to contend with. I hope we realize this, that behind the scenes we have a very powerful and a very subtle enemy. And he is constantly on the alert, watching, looking at the world, seeking to disrupt the work of God's kingdom.

And we have to be alert. We have to be constantly watchful and vigilant, lest he should take us unawares. And this same enemy, unrelenting and restless, hates God.

That's the one truth that stands out about Satan throughout the whole Bible. He hates God. And when God commends Job, my servant, that's a phrase that recurs at the end of the book.

God has a delight in Job, my servant. When God commends Job to Satan, what does Satan do? He replies with a very cynical charge. Does Job fear God for naught? Why? Look what you've done for him.

No wonder he fears you. No wonder he praises you. Look at everything that you've given to him.

It's a cynical charge. Does Job fear God for naught? Of course he fears you. Look at the way you've endowed him with all these gifts and blessings.

So, he brings a charge against Job, that Job's interest in God is merely self-interest. That Job's concern is with God's gifts. That he's much more interested in God's gifts than in God himself.

That's the charge. So he's against Job. But not only is Satan against Job, he's against God.

That's the real nub of the problem. It's God that Satan is against. It's he, the almighty creator, whom he is seeking to disparage.

He wants to discredit God through Job. He wants to prove that the only reason why people fear God is because God gives them so much. And the people are only interested in God because he is the giver.

They're not interested in him because he is God. That's the charge. He wants to disparage God, to discredit God's love.

He brings this cynical, contemptuous, hateful charge against Job, but also ultimately against God himself. And the mystery is that God allows him the freedom to act. Has thou not made an hedge about him, says

Satan, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land.

But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. That's the charge. Take away all these gifts, and you'll find that Job will curse you.

His trust in you will evaporate. He will no longer be the righteous servant, the servant that you have spoken to me about. He will curse thee to thy face.

And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power. Only upon himself put not forth thine hand. Now that, it seems to me, is one of the most mysterious verses in the Bible.

God saying to Satan, all that Job has is in your power, but do not touch him. It's impossible for anybody to expand that verse. What we do know is that God took the lead.

It was God who gave Satan permission. It was God, as it were, who was putting his own name up for analysis. It was God who chose Job as the battleground in the conflict.

It was God who chose his own name to be put on trial. We must remember this, that the choice in this whole matter of the sufferings of Job was with the Almighty Sovereign God. He chose to do it.

He chose to do it in his own way, for his own reasons, but he chose to do it and he gave Job's possessions and family into the hand of Satan. I say that is a great mystery. God giving Satan permission.

It reminds me of that tremendous verse in Luke's Gospel when our Lord says, But now this is your hour and the power of darkness. As he faced the cross, this is your hour and the power of darkness. Dear friends, we should never forget the spiritual dimension.

We should always remember that though we are here on the earth, though we move and live and have our being in this material universe, there is another dimension altogether which is so close and yet is so far. The spirit of life in Christ Jesus dwells within us, so we have the spiritual dimension already within us and yet there is a great gap between us and this spiritual dimension. We are in the earth, we are on the world, we are here in time and space, eternity, the spiritual realm, it's all there around us.

But we are rooted to space and time and we are in the body and it's hard for us to imagine the spiritual realm. But there are these hints, these shafts of light in the Bible, aren't there? Think of Paul's marvelous phrase in Ephesians that the heavenly places, the high places, the places into which God in Christ has raised us and made us to sit, but those same heavenly places, they are the region in which there is a great conflict going on between God and Satan and behind the scenes we are being the subjects of attack. We as it were are under attack from Satan and God is as it were hinging his own glory and the power and the might of his own name to our response to affliction and to disease and death.

So though we don't see it, we, the church, Christian people are at the center of this vast cosmic conflict between God and Satan and all his emissaries. And if God in his sovereign providence provides us with prosperity then let us ask him to give us the grace and humility to deal with it well. But if God allows Satan to afflict us and to remove these things from us then let us seek to respond in the way that Job responded.

That brings me to the third and final thing that I want to say this morning. The triumph of grace. The triumph of grace.

This is why God allowed Satan to afflict Job. It's something that Job was unaware of. This insight was not given to him but it is given to us.

Think of the stages in his sufferings for a moment. First of all, the removal of his possessions and then his family. It all happened so suddenly.

One day his sons and daughters were with him. The next day they'd gone. Have you ever known a day like that? An evil day.

One day he was surrounded with possessions. Next day they'd gone. And he was a man of God.

He had prayed for his children but his children were dead. Were his prayers in vain? The devastation seemed total. There was hardly a crumb of comfort.

One after another the blows fell and each disaster seemed calculated to destroy his confidence in God. The enemies attacked but then there was a natural disaster. The enemies attacked again and then another natural disaster.

It seemed that there might be some explanation if the enemies were held responsible for the catastrophes but the sudden catastrophe that was unexpected and without any human mediation, what's the explanation for that? We call it an act of God. And the disasters are all linked in that way. And the same refrain comes over to Job as the messengers come to tell him the sad news.

I alone am escaped to tell thee. I alone am escaped to tell thee. I am alone escaped to tell thee.

He's being beaten. He's being bruised by the successive blows. Satan a callous unmerciful and hostile foe.

So we see Job losing his family and his possessions. Now Job could have responded like a stoic. He could have despised these chastenings.

Or he might have responded like the critic. He might have fainted and complained and murmured beneath the weight of these afflictions. But that is not Job's response.

In an agony of grief and sorrow as the news comes the death of his sons and of the death of his cattle and of the removal of all his possessions. What does he do? He falls before the face of the Almighty and worships, worships. He arose, rent his mantle, shaved his head, fell down upon the ground and worshiped.

That was his response. And you will notice that even though his heart was bleeding and his soul burdened, even though he'd lost children whom he'd loved, he nevertheless worshiped the great creator who had showered all these blessings upon him. And in worshipping the Lord, what was it that filled his mind? Was it the omnipotence of God? Was it the justice of God? Was it the sovereignty of God? Well, in a sense we might understand if that were the thing that were filling his mind.

But it isn't. The thing that fills Job's mind is the goodness of God. Naked came I out of my mother's womb.

Naked shall I return thither. The Lord gave. The Lord hath taken away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. He had suffered bitter loss. He was now destitute.

But the very loss that he'd experienced made him acknowledge that God had given him everything in the first place. The gifts that God had given him, his sons and daughters and possessions, were precious to him for one reason only. Because they were the gifts of God.

Because he was a God-fearing and a God-centered man. He thought of the goodness of God when everything was removed from him. He was reminded of his indebtedness to God.

God had given him those gifts for a while. But God had taken those gifts away from him. God was good.

It was God that Job was really interested in. And the fact that God had taken away his gifts, having loaned them to him for a period of time, still meant that God was good. This is the thing that was at the heart of Job's worship.

The Lord gave. The Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

My dear friend, sometimes in pastoral work, you have the inestimable privilege of visiting somebody who has been suddenly and devastatingly bereaved. Once I had that experience in Chessington visiting a husband and a wife whose son, the age of 27, about to take his PhD degree, returning from his teaching post in Cheltenham to Chessington on a Friday night, hit a patch of black ice on the A40 and hit a tree and was instantly killed. And I went to visit them at half past eight on that Saturday morning.

And the father, he couldn't speak. He simply threw his arms around me and he said, Lord gave. Lord hath taken away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. There is no privilege like being a Christian pastor on occasions like that. When you see a power of God's grace in absolute desolation and sadness, that is the Christian response.

His response was not merely to worship God and to acknowledge his sovereignty and his omnipotence. He was filled with a sense of God's goodness. The Lord had given that son to him for 27 years.

The Lord had taken him away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. That's what Christianity does, do you see? Nothing else can do that.

No philosophy in the world can do that. This is the nerve center of Christianity. All the goodness that we receive from God is his gift to us, but he is God the giver.

And if he gives and takes away, then he is good. That's the thing that occupies Job's mind. And so that's the response of a true Christian.

The devastation of family and possessions. But then, as if that were not sufficient, there is the second wave of affliction that comes over him, where again Satan is allowed, this time to touch his health, to touch his body. And Job breaks out in sores and becomes seriously ill, and ill in a way that made him offensive to look at.

Here he is. What a picture of toil and suffering. His health is gone.

He's grotesque in his appearance. People look away from him. They cannot look upon his countenance.

And his wife, his wife, who is spared to him throughout this great crisis, his wife. His wife says to him, in a moment of weakness and absolute despair, curse God and die. She is the unwilling and the unwitting

servant of Satan.

She is saying to Job what Satan really wants him to do. Curse God and die. Think of the pressure this man is under.

Broken, bruised, bullied, destitute, having lost everything. And yet, at the same time, he is able to respond to his wife and say, Thou who speakest as one of the foolish women speakest. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God and shall we not receive evil? Notice here the difference between his first response and his second response.

It's not now a question of Job being deprived of God's gifts, which was the case with his possessions and with his family. Now he is actually exposed to trouble. He is receiving from God's hand evil.

Evil. He is being exposed to torture and to torment and to sickness and even health. He is not receiving a gift, then to lose it.

He is now being exposed to trouble and difficulty. And he has no explanation. He has no light.

But in the midst of it all, in the darkness of this terrible experience, Job did not sin with his lips. He still trusted God. He still looked into the face of God and saw him as his father and his friend and his God.

Now, at last, we are in the position to see something of this great mystery of providence. There may be many reasons why God allows godly people to suffer. He may allow us to suffer to purify our souls from sin.

He may allow us to suffer that we might grow thereby. He allows us to suffer to prepare us for the glory to come. But here is another and a great reason why God allows the godly to suffer.

And it's easy to forget this. It was hidden even from Job. We are in the realm of this conflict between God and Satan.

Here is God's enemy, Satan. Here is Job, God's servant. And there's a conflict going on between God and Satan over this man, Job.

And his one aim, Satan's one aim, was to discredit Job. To discredit God. To cast, as it were, the lie into God's teeth and to say to God, the only reason why Job worships you is because of all that you have given to him.

So the issue is this. Would Job still maintain his trust in God? Would he still worship God? Would he still be a man who maintained this integrity and came in an attitude of fear and humility before the living God? God chose Job as the battleground in this conflict between himself and Satan. And the issue is this.

It's an issue that you and I have to face. What are we going to do when we are afflicted? When we are sick? When things are taken from us? When we are bruised and battered by life? And when God allows us to suffer, what are we going to do? Do we really fear God because God has given us so much? Or do we really love God for his own sake? How do we really respond to God's love and God's grace to us? That's the issue. How would Job respond to such loss? Would he curse God? Would he die? Would he abandon his faith and trust? Or would he stand the test? Well, we know what his response was.

He worshiped. He did not sin with his lips. He reprovved his wife and acknowledged God's goodness in giving him both good and evil.

He stood the test. He's only a man. He's a weak man like you and me.

He's a feeble sinner like us. He suffers in a way perhaps that we have not. And yet, even though he's weak, even though he's suffering, nevertheless, he's doing something that is of incalculable and invaluable worth in the eyes of God and heaven and eternity.

He's glorifying God in the midst of total devastation. Satan charges God. He charges Job.

And he is charging God, let us make no mistake about it, with loving and blessing men and granting them gifts and granting them the things that Job had received for the wrong reasons. He is really bringing a malicious charge against God. What is Job's response? What is your response and mine going to be in the face of such afflictions? Well, if we are Christians, real Christians, and if God should allow Satan to afflict us and test us in this way, and if we should be chosen to be the battleground of a conflict between heaven and hell, our great privilege is in the midst of it all to glorify the power of God's grace.

Because there is only one thing in the universe that can make a man respond to affliction like that. One thing only, and that is the grace of God. There's no other power in the world that can do that.

You and I, therefore, have the opportunity to prove the power of God's grace. I believe we have the opportunity to do it as individuals. I believe we have the opportunity to do it as churches.

Because there are times in the life of a church when God allows the church to be afflicted. When a church may go through a dark period, when a church may find itself denuded of blessings, when God may cause a people to be diminished in numbers, when he may cause a church to go through a financial stringency, God may allow this to happen to the church. He may allow it to happen to an individual person.

What are we going to do? What is our response going to be to such catastrophe? Well, we must look behind the scenes. We must see this cosmic conflict that is taking place. There is a whole hierarchy of evil.

You remember that verse in Genesis 3 15, the seed of the woman shall bruise your head. We are told in that great verse that there is both a seed of the woman and a seed of the serpent. And there is a whole seed, there is a whole hierarchy of evil power and influence at work behind the scenes.

And all the time, though we may not realize it, we have a spiritual, malevolent, malignant enemy, subtle and powerful. And this world and you and I are his battleground. We are all involved, all of us.

We particularly who have been set free and who have been made heirs of Christ and joint heirs with God, we are the particular battleground of Satan and his emissaries. And his aim is to discredit God, to take away from the glory of God through us, through bringing the sort of charge that he brings against Job and against God, that we only love God because of the gifts that God has given to us. And so he attacks the church and he undermines the church if he can.

And he wants to discredit God's handiwork here in the church. And if he can do that, he is happy. So in the mystery of his own wisdom and his own providence, God allows his people and his church to be afflicted.

He allows us to be tested. He allows us to go through the fire. He exposes us to injury and to sickness and to bereavement and to sadness.

Why? Why? In order that he might prove, in order that he might show to principalities and powers in heavenly places his own wisdom. In order that he might demonstrate to the devil and to all the agencies of evil that his grace is able to make people like you and me triumph in the midst of those sufferings. Only grace can do that.

Only the power of God's love in Christ towards a weak, mortal, feeble creature can cause that creature to triumph in the evil day. Nothing else. Think of the apostles.

Think of the martyrs. Think of John the Baptist. Think of Christians in prison behind the iron curtain today.

Think of your own family. Think of the sadness that has come perhaps into your life. What is God doing? He is giving us the opportunity to prove the power of his grace.

He is giving us the enormous privilege of glorifying his name and of praising his grace and of giving the devil the lie and of proving that his grace is stronger than all. The omnipotence of grace. There is nothing to compare with it, my friends.

And if we could but sure, the apostles and the martyrs and those who have gone on before us would be saying something to us, would they not this morning? Indeed, some of us may have remembered a sermon that Dr. Lloyd-Jones preached in which he spoke about these apostles and prophets and martyrs shouting encouragement to us. What's their testimony? Many of them burned to death. Many of them dying as young men.

Many of them being stripped of their possessions and living in holes in the ground. Many of them going through fire and torture for the sake of the kingdom of God. And they see us.

They're looking at us. The whole spiritual realm is alert and aghast as they see you and me. What's their testimony? What do they say to us as they watch us? Finding, following, keeping, struggling.

That's what we are doing, isn't it? That's our testimony here on the earth. We are finding, following, keeping, struggling. And the question that we ask is, is he sure to bless? That's the question.

It's the right question that you and I have to face. Is he sure to bless? Saints, apostles, prophets, martyrs answer, yes. Yes, he is able to bless.

He will carry us through. He will give us the victory. Victorious martyrs join their legs and shout the omnipotence of grace.

What grace this is. What marvelous grace it is. We were reminded last night about the amazing grace that saved a wretch like me.

You remember how Newton goes on? Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come. It was grace that brought me safe thus far. And grace will lead me home.

We mustn't underestimate the power of God's grace to enable even us to conquer. You, me, we can conquer. In the evil day, we were only talking about this this morning at the breakfast table.

And I was just reminding those who were sitting at our table of a lady who belonged to the church where I used to be the minister. And whose husband was a very sick man for all his life. Schizophrenic, very depressed individual who would either be at the height of elation or in the depths of despair.

And when in the depths of despair he would be unable to face the sorrow, would shut himself off in his room and would not speak to even his wife. He'd never once during the long course of their marriage ever said thank you to her for a thing. He was a desperately sick man but he was a Christian.

And he was paralyzed by the fear of death. He couldn't face it. It haunted him every moment of his life.

And in such distress and anguish, he would go every week, every Friday evening to visit Dr. Lloyd-Jones in Westminster Chapel where they were members. And the doctor would pat him on the shoulder and say to him, Mr. Bailey, God is good and God is with you. On one occasion he said to him, Mr. Bailey, you will not see death.

One morning this poor man got out of bed, came down into the living room and collapsed on the floor. His lung had punctured and he was dying. Mrs. Bailey sat there with her husband's head on her lap.

They had a half an hour of heaven together. He thanked her for all that she had done for him. He told her how much he had loved her.

He had never told her in his life that he had loved her. He told her that he loved her. He thanked her for her unceasing care, her tenderness, her patience, her love.

And he said to her, Hilda, I'm going to glory and I'm not afraid. My best day is about to dawn. He became himself.

And in half an hour at the end of a long life, he glorified God's grace in a way perhaps that many Christians have been unable to do through a lifetime of service. That's what God's grace can do. It's marvelous.

And if Satan decides to choose you and me as the battleground for this conflict with God, he is a fool. Because ultimately the conflict will bring greater glory to God. And can we respond as Job did, not only with worship and praise, but with unceasing trust in the God who made us and the God who in the Lord Jesus Christ has set his love upon us.

There's a great book written about this book of Job called the Triumph of Job over Satan. It's a very good book, but I think it could be entitled the Triumph of God's Grace in Job over Satan. Can we maintain our trust in God? Can we trust in God despite all afflictions? If we do, we enhance his glory, we praise his name and feeble, weak and anguished souls, though we may be, we shall be able to shout the omnipotence of grace.

That is what God's grace enables people like you and me to do. Should all the hosts of hell and powers of darkness unknown put their most dreadful forms of rage and malice on, I shall be safe, for Christ displays superior power and guardian grace. And there's something even better than that, isn't there? The feeblest saint shall win the day, though death and hell obstruct the way.

God's grace. Thank God for it. We shall triumph too.

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