

The Arrows of the Almighty

by Lehman Strauss

The sermon emphasizes the sovereignty of God in the face of suffering, using Job's trials as a profound example of faith and integrity.

Scripture: Job 1:20

Topics: "Sovereignty Of God", "Faith And Suffering"

Description

Lehman Strauss preaches on the sovereignty of God as demonstrated through the trials of Job. Job's unwavering faith and trust in God despite immense suffering showcase the assurance of safety and security believers have in their Heavenly Father's control over all situations. The story of Job reveals that even the most righteous individuals may face deep valleys and severe trials, but through it all, God remains in control, allowing nothing to happen by chance. Job's example teaches us to accept both blessings and adversities from God's hand with unwavering faith and worship.

Transcript

The child of God must be continually mindful that his Heavenly Father programs everything that happens to him. The trials that come, whether slight or severe, are for his good. An understanding of this truth will give the believer in Christ the assurance of safety and security.

There is great peace in the knowledge of the father-child relationship the Christian has with God. Whether or not things are going well, it is possible for every believer in Christ to say with Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15).

If ever a man was justified in asking why he was afflicted with sorrow and suffering, Job was that man. He needed all the help he could get. What he did not need was someone to add to his burden and aggravate his problem.

Eliphaz, one of Job's friends, believed that the sickness and suffering he was experiencing could be explained only on the basis of some sin in his life. He sought to impress upon Job his philosophy that righteous people are not made to suffer; therefore, Job's trial was the result of his own wrongdoing (Job 4:7-8). But Eliphaz was wrong! The accusations he leveled against Job only added to the patriarch's misery.

Bad things do happen to good people, even to the best of the good ones. Job was one of the choicest among God's people. The Lord Himself testified of Job that there was none like him in the earth, that he was a perfect and an upright man, and that he feared God and hated evil (Job 1:1, 8).

Job was known for being faithful. He was not sinless, as the word perfect in verses 1 and 8 might imply. A better word might be blameless, meaning that he was ethically upright, morally above reproach, and religiously devoted to God. Job had a deep and devout reverence for the Lord. His consistent practice was to hold God in highest awe and respect. He was faithful.

Job was known for his fortune. "His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household" (Job 1:3). He possessed vast wealth, and it was God who had caused him to prosper (Job 1:10, 21).

Job was known for his family. "And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters" (Job 1:2). Job's family and his fortune were the blessings of God. The record shows that Job loved his family. His love for God was reflected in his love for his children. As the spiritual leader of his family, he carried them all in his prayers to God. The highest service a parent can render to his children is to care for their spiritual welfare. Job was a good family man.

Finally, Job was a man of fame. The inspired record says he was "the greatest of all the men of the east" (Job 1:3). Job stood head and shoulders above the men of his day. He rated high with both man and God. God Himself affirmed that He had no reason to afflict Job (Job 2:3).

Yet God allowed Job to go through a deep valley and subjected him to a severe trial. Most of us would have cracked under the same conditions. How are we to understand the sorrows and sufferings of Job? How can we enter into the meaning of his adversities and afflictions?

The first two chapters of this ancient book contain the essentials to understanding its message. During World War II, I was serving God in a pastorate in Bristol, Pennsylvania. Then news came that one of the charter members of that church had been killed in action while serving his country. I prepared a message that I hoped would be appropriate for the occasion, one that would meet some of the needs of that soldier's hurting parents. I entitled the sermon, "Why Righteous People Suffer." I still have the pulpit notes I made of that sermon. In my introduction I said that the book of Job was written to tell us why God's children suffer.

Forty years have passed since I preached that sermon. I would not preach it today as I preached it then. That is because the message of the book of Job is not "why God's children are caused to suffer," but rather "the sovereignty of God." It tells us that God is always in control in every situation at all times. Nothing happens to us by chance or accident. For every effect there is a cause. If we fail to see this great truth in the book of Job, we have missed its major message.

The First Affliction

Act One in this drama presents a scene in heaven. The angelic creatures, fallen and unfallen, are made to appear before the Lord. God remains in control, demanding that angels and demons report to Him. Among them stands Satan, whose name means "the adversary." He is no ordinary human adversary; rather, he is a superhuman spirit being, the one who beguiled Eve through his subtlety (2 Corinthians 11:3). He has continued to harass God's children ever since. The apostle Peter warned believers, "Be sober, be vigilant;

because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Job was one of Satan's targets.

It all began with a conversation in heaven between God and Satan.

And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?

Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for naught?

Hast not thou made an hedge about him, 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. (Job 1:8-11)

Here Satan accused Job of serving God because of the blessings God bestowed upon him. In substance, the devil told God that Job served Him, not because he loved and revered Him but because of what he had received from God. Satan then challenged God to put Job to the test by taking his possessions from him. This was Satan's accusation against Job: Those who profess to love God and worship Him do so only because God provides for them materially and protects them.

But something was involved in Satan's charge that goes much deeper than his accusation against Job. He was attacking the character of God. In essence, Satan said, "You tell me that Job loves and serves You out of respect and reverence for You. Let me tell you the real reason he worships You. You bribed him. You bought him for a price. Men and women do not worship You from a heart of love. They do it for what they get out of it. Everything man does in obedience to You, he does for personal gain. You know this is true, so You give him the good things of life to win his love and devotion."

In this sneering charge, Satan did not merely impugn Job's motive for serving God, but he slandered God's motive for giving possessions and protection to Job. He was actually slandering the character of God. Satan argued that if God were to take Job's possessions from him the patriarch would cease to be loyal to Him.

A conflict grew out of that conversation in heaven between God and Satan. God's character had been challenged, and the adversary had to be proven wrong. So, permission was given to Satan to put Job to the test. God gave Satan the liberty to take away Job's possessions.

This liberty was limited, however, to all that was involved in the hedge to which Satan referred in Job 1:10. Satan was restrained from touching his person (Job 1:12). The sovereignty of God is seen in the limitations that He placed upon Satan. The test would prove Satan wrong. He must learn that Job was not serving God for personal gain.

Satan proceeded to the outer limits of those restrictions. In a swift succession of events, Job's possessions, which had taken him almost a lifetime to accumulate, were stripped from him. Thieving bands of Sabeans and Chaldeans raided the livestock and killed the hired hands. Lightning bolts destroyed the 7,000 sheep and the shepherds. The climax of the disaster came when a tornado destroyed the house, killing all of Job's children (Job 1:13-19). Job was put to the ultimate test. He was crushed by the report of the losses. This was Job's severest trial, his deepest valley.

Keep in mind that Job did not have the faintest idea of why it had all happened. He did not know that God had chosen him as His special instrument to demonstrate that men do love and serve Him because He is God, and to defend the character of God. To Job, the trial was without meaning and understanding. But as we shall see, Job did prove that a man's love and devotion to God can be genuine, even in the bitterest of trials.

Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped.

And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord (Job 1:20-21).

Rending his robe and shaving his head were signs of grief. These were rites of mourning. Falling to the ground was not an act of desperation, but a deed of reverence and submission before God. In so doing, Job "worshipped" (1:20).

G. Campbell Morgan in *The Analyzed Bible* said, "Job is powerless against his enemy up to a certain point. There is, however, an inner citadel which the enemy cannot touch." Peter called it "the hidden man of the heart" (1 Peter 3:4). And Paul said, "though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16). The "outward man" of which Paul spoke corresponds to the "earthen vessels" (4:7), "the body" (4:10), and "our mortal flesh" (4:11). The body is our physical, mortal frame, and it is decaying. Everything-- our frame, faculties, family, fame, and fortune--is steadily decaying through an irreversible process. As the things of this earth fade, the things of the Spirit, which are eternal, become more precious.

Job's losses no doubt taxed his physical strength, but Satan could not reach his inner nature. Satan cannot touch the life that his hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3). Job learned that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12: 15). There was a light in his soul that Satan could not extinguish. Job proved that a child of God will love and serve Him even though all material things are taken from him.

Perhaps the greatest testimony of Job's faith is in his words following Satan's first assault upon him. He said, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). Ponder those words seriously and soberly. They witness to Job's faith in the sovereignty of God--the fact that God is in full control of His universe, including the earth and all created things in it, animate and inanimate. Any disposition God chooses to make of any part of His creation is His sovereign right. God gave Job his family and his fortune, and God took them from him. Job's faith in God was victoriously vindicated, as was God's faith in Job. Job did not curse God as Satan predicted (1:11); rather, he praised God (1:21).

Job's personal relationship with God remained at the highest level, in spite of the bitter experiences that had touched his life. His trial only deepened his faith and drew him closer to God. He praised the Lord when his family and fortune were given to him, and he continued to praise Him when the Lord took them from him.

Christians should never question the sovereignty of God. Our Heavenly Father never makes a mistake. When we believe this, we prove the devil to be wrong in his estimate of God and His children.

The Second Affliction

Chapter 2 in the book of Job records the second trial Job suffered. The second council meeting in heaven followed the pattern of the first. Once more the angels appeared before God, and Satan again presented himself. The Lord once more spoke His thoughts about His servant Job (Job 2:1-3). But this time He added the words, "And still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause" (Job 2:3).

God restated His faith in Job's integrity and reminded Satan that his accusation against Job was without foundation ("without cause"). Satan's lie about Job was disproved.

Satan accused God again of protecting Job, insisting that the restrictions God had placed upon him were a hindrance in proving his charge against Job. He could not deny that the loss of Job's family and his fortune had not lessened his loyalty to God. Even so, Satan made no mention of Job's faithfulness to God or to his own failure.

And Satan answered the Lord, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life.

But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. (Job 2:4-5)

Satan was saying that a man is not really tested until his own flesh and bones are made to suffer. Any person will surrender his possessions as long as he himself is spared.

The word life in verse 4 has reference to Job's person, his body. H. H. Rowley comments, "Job's life is not in question here, since if he were killed the motive of his piety could not thereby be determined." Satan was asking God for permission to afflict Job's body. Death would be easier than painful, agonizing suffering; so, if Job were subjected to torture, he would renounce God. Satan's language clearly shows his low estimate of a true child of God.

"And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life" (Job 2:6). God accepted Satan's challenge but gave this limitation: Satan could not kill him. The word life in verse 6 is rendered differently from that in verse 4.

So the devil went forth with a vicious vengeance to do his ugly work against the good man of God. "Satan . . . smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown" (Job 2:7). Let us not lose sight of the fact that the physical affliction of Job was added to a sorrow that was already deep in his heart, the grief over the death of his children and the loss of his earthly possessions.

Has ever a man or a woman, apart from our Lord Jesus Christ, been in a valley so deep or suffered a trial so severe? I think not. Burning ulcers like a leprosy covered Job's body, causing him great pain and agony. The symptoms mentioned in the book of Job are many: inflamed eruptions (2:7); maggots in the ulcers (7:5); terrifying dreams (7:14); running tears blinding the eyes (16:16); fetid breath (19:17); emaciated body (19:20); erosion of the bones (30:17); blackening and peeling off of the skin (30:30). Satan went to the limit to turn Job against God.

Adding to Job's anguish of body and mind was the reaction of his wife. She said to him, "Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God, and die" (Job 2:9). Frankly, I do not know what prompted her to speak as she did. I suspect that she did not know God intimately and personally as Job did, for she blamed God

for the adversity and affliction that had come into their home. Her attitude seems to have been a reflection of her mental and spiritual condition. After all, she suffered the same losses as Job did. But now she could only stand by helplessly and watch him suffer. It was more than she could endure. Whatever prompted her to suggest that he renounce God and die could only add to Job's suffering.

His answer to his wife, his one remaining treasure on earth, in no way casts doubt upon his love for her. It does declare, however, his unswerving love and loyalty to God. By using a simple question, he testified to the sovereignty of God in everything that touched their lives, both good and bad: "What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job 2:10). With this question, Job sought to help her see that she should be as willing as he was to accept the bitter as well as the better. It is a reminder of the sovereign right of God to do what He wants to do, when He decides to do it, for the purpose He chooses to accomplish, and to involve whomever He will. The person who truly loves God is willing to accept from His hand not only the good things but also affliction and adversity.

We are told that "in all this did not Job sin with his lips" (Job 2:10). He passed the test with a perfect grade. Satan had been defeated. Moreover, the devil does not appear again in the entire book of Job.

As I studied these two chapters in Job, the question God asked twice of Satan challenged me. It was as though the Lord asked me, "Have you considered My servant Job?" Have I learned the lesson of Job's experience? Is my will totally surrendered to God's will, as was Job's? Do I love my Lord and bow before Him in worship now that Elsie remains paralyzed and suffers? Can I say sincerely from a dedicated heart, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord"?

I am thankful for what God has taught me as I remain in His waiting room. I feel as David felt during his time of trial, when he prayed, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes" (Psalm 119:71).

The waiting room has truly been my learning place. And if I have learned nothing else from this experience, I now know that I had much to learn.

I expect to meet Job one day. I will thank him for the rich legacy. He has helped me to regard my trial, not as the fiery darts of Satan (Ephesians 6:16) but as "the arrows of the Almighty" (Job 6:4). He who sent the arrows has bound up and dressed the wounds. In His own time, and for His good purpose, He will heal them perfectly. "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15).

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