



## Job and Jesus - Job 29:7-25

Melvin Tinker

*This is the fifth in a series of sermons by Rev Melvin Tinker based on the book of Job. It would be helpful to read Job chapters 29 and 30 before listening to, or reading, the sermon.*

*To go to the next part of the series, [click here](#).*

Some of you may remember how a few years ago we were very privileged to have as our guest speaker Bishop Frank Reteif from South Africa. He spoke on the text from 1 Peter 1:7 that Christians sufferer all kinds of tests 'so that your faith - of greater worth than gold which perishes even though refined by fire - may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus is revealed.' He then suggested a little thought experiment. He said: 'Imagine that you had been brought up in the perfect family. You never heard your Mum and Dad exchange a cross word with each other. They were patient and kind all the time. You too were perfect from the day you were born. You never had nappy rash; you never had mumps, you never had colic or measles or any other the other things babies tend to have. Of course when you went to school everything worked out just right for you. You never failed an exam; you were always top of the class, excelled in sports, exemplary in behaviour. You never had to go to the dentist to have a brace fixed because your teeth were fit for a Colgate ad. Then you managed to get to university and there you sailed through with all the top grades, you were voted student of the year. You never got drunk, were never late for a lecture, you always went to church, you were just fantastic. Then you met this stunner of a girl. And guess what? She came from

a perfect family. She never had nappy rash or mumps, she got all the right grades, had the right hair and perfect teeth. Then you got married and have the most brilliantly paid job, wonderful house and car - no student debts to pay for you. Then you have children and - yes you've guessed it - they were perfect, never having nappy rash, never having mumps, not a sleepless night. They grow up as Christians; never put a foot wrong and they sail through school, university, get married and and on and on it goes. Then at the ripe old age of 107 never having had a day's illness in your life or a squabble with a neighbour or a bad hair day, you pass over from this world to the next. Wouldn't that be wonderful? But then ask this question: 'Who would ever know that you were a Christian?' Oh you could say you were. But who would *really* ever know it? The only way people will really see the difference our faith makes, what we are really trusting in is when the world turns against us, when troubles come our way and calamity overtakes us. Only then can we prove to the world (and maybe to ourselves) that we have something better than they have. But *only* then.' And surely that is right isn't it? The 'ideal life' means nothing unless it is also the 'tested life'.

And when you think about it, that is what we see being worked through in the story of Job. Right at the very beginning in chapter 1 we are presented with a man who has the ideal life. It is the blessed life, a life of *shalom*, of perfect harmony and wholeness. In verse 1 we are told that he is 'blameless and upright' literally, 'complete and straight'. So he was an honest man. What is more, he was a genuinely spiritual man, for he 'feared God and shunned evil'. That is, his relationships with his maker and his neighbours were as good as you could get. He had his own land, another sign of blessing, and livestock and servants in abundance. He was blessed with a family too - seven sons and three daughters no less - the number of completeness. But - how does anyone know that his faith is genuine, apart from God that is? Enter Satan. In fact the original has the definite article in front of the name so he is *the* Satan which places the emphasis on his function which is to act as a prosecutor of people before the judgement seat of God. Satan means adversary or accuser. It is more of a technical legal term rather than a proper name. In fact we might refer to this angelic being as *the* chief prosecutor. Here his adversarial role is not

directed against *God* as such, but much more against God's people. We see this in 1:9, '*Does Job fear God for nothing. Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has?*' In other words, 'I put it to you, your honour, that Job stands accused of bad faith. It is not a sincere faith, it lacks authenticity. It is not a trusting in you that he is showing but a trusting in his surroundings.' So how is Job's faith going to be proved? The answer - take away everything else and then see what is left - faith or non-faith in God.

But why should the Satan be so envious of mankind that he sees it as his main reason for existing to discredit people before God? What is it about you as a Christian which drives Satan to single you out as a target for his vengeful allegations so that he insists that God condemns you? Well, to answer that question we need to place the story of Job within the wider setting of God's story of redemption. This means going back to the beginning with Adam and then back to the future with Jesus.

First, back to the beginning with Adam. What was the purpose in God creating human beings? Part of the answer is that he made them in his image so as to rule over the creation for him - Genesis 1:26. That is a magnificent position to be given isn't it? No angel is given this privileged and exalted status, only human beings. Now that could make some creature that has an axe to grind a little envious might it not? So God places the man and the women in the most fantastic surroundings to get on with this work. It is a country park called Eden. It has everything - rivers, gold and precious metals, diamonds, fruit trees, livestock. The man and the women are King and Queen of their own little domain. When you think about it that is very similar to Job's situation in chapter 1. He too has a 'hedge around him', placed there by God, as Satan reminds him. He has wealth and livestock, a wife and family, his own little Eden in many ways. Job is reflecting his God-given image, ruling his little world under God - for after all he 'fears God and shuns evil.'

So what happens in Eden? As they set to work, the man and the woman are accosted by a serpent that tests them. Are they really trusting God, believing that he is as good as his word or not? They have everything, but not the one thing which God has forbidden - to eat of the tree of

knowledge of good and evil. God has kept that prerogative for himself - *he* is the *lawmaker* not man, *man* is to be the *lawkeeper*. And so the seed of doubt is sown, '*Did God say?*' And from doubt is born disobedience, the fruit was eaten and humankind was brought into disgrace and they are barred from their inheritance. In effect they surrendered true dominion to Satan. From that moment their descendants have been struggling ever since to maintain what is left of their rule on earth. The apostle John tells us that the '*whole world* (cosmos) is in the power of the evil one' (1 John 5:19). The word '*cosmos*' originally meant an intricately and beautifully worked piece of jewellery, by the time of John it meant the organised interlocking system of cultures, governments, worldviews and fashions which, because of so much of its inspiration comes from Satan have in effect been surrendered to his control.

So you see, given humankind's original place as vice-regents over God's world and the future possible extension of that rule to include the universe and angels, then we can understand Satan's envy and hostility towards us. He is not just concerned with inflicting suffering per se, but putting people under such duress that they will become discredited and disqualified in God's sight as rightful heirs of the world he has made. So it would seem that God has permitted Satan to have this function of testing and sifting. Once a person has failed the test then he becomes their accuser before God, condemning them as unfit to serve him. And I don't know about you, but as I look at my life I can see Satan has a pretty good case to bring before God. If God were to say to Satan of me, as he did of Job, 'Have you considered my servant Melvin? There is no one on earth like him, he is blameless and upright.' Satan would burst out laughing. Of course I stand condemned in myself without a leg to stand on - and so do you.

But that does not prevent God from seeking to fulfil his original plan to rule the world through a human being. Adam, God's servant and son, was tested and failed. Israel, also known as God's servant and son, was tested and failed. David and all the other kings after him also known as God's servants and sons, were tested and failed even though they had everything materially. Job - 'God's servant' was tested and failed. So is there another son of God, a servant of God who can be

tested and will not fail? Someone who can win back our inheritance for us and send Satan packing? If so, then at the very least that person must undergo testing far more intense, far more destructive than anything Job could have endured. The Bible brings the great news that, yes there is and his name is Jesus.

So let's go back to the future with Jesus.

Of course as the eternal son of God and the second person in the Trinity he has everything and always has had everything. But in order to fulfil the eternal plan of having a man rule his world then two things needed to happen. First, God had to become a man, a real man. That meant undergoing all that humans have to undergo, including the testing. Second, the world had to be reclaimed for God and man which meant being released from Satan's grip. People somehow had to become immune from the Satan's accusations - so God, the judge, could declare them to be *not guilty* and it be true that their guilt has been dealt with. All of that we see being worked out in the mission of Jesus.

Why, as soon as he is born Jesus is subject to testing with the fury of Herod, someone else who wanted to be king and so imitate his master Satan. The result, the holy family's flight into Egypt as refugees.

We hear very little of Jesus for about thirty years except for a little incident recorded in Luke's gospel when Jesus was about 12 years old. There was a subtle testing. His family, having discovered he was not with the pilgrims on their return back to Nazareth, found him in the temple debating with the religious leaders. Mary rebukes him, but Jesus whilst being respectful reminds her of his first calling to 'be in his Father's house' - *God* comes first.

But it is after his baptism and the public confirmation of his identity and mission in the Jordan river with the Holy Spirit coming upon him like a dove, receiving an anointing, which is what the word Christ means - a King is the anointed one, the heavenly voice speaks quoting two passages of Scripture - Psalm 2 and Isaiah 42. Psalm 2 speaks of God's King, his Son who rules the world. Isaiah 42 speaks of God's servant who will suffer to save the world. And the

suffering begins right away with the temptations in the wilderness.

For 40 days and 40 nights, as Israel was tested in the desert for 40 years, Jesus is tested. Three tests are recorded which seem to encompass all the testing of that long period and they all have to do with somehow distracting Jesus from the path of suffering to establish God's rule. The first is the temptation to be a great provider of human needs - turn stones into bread - after all you can always buy a following. Second, perform a spectacular stunt in the temple - Jews loved signs and wonders, then you will have your kingdom. Or go for the military option - in effect, bow to Satan. Jesus rejects them all and each time chooses to believe God's Word. Then Luke records something very significant in chapter 4:13, he says, 'When the devil had finished all his testing, he left him *until* an opportune time.'

Isn't that what it was like with Job? There we have Satan in full display at the beginning of the story only to disappear - apparently - but as we saw, not *really* disappear. His testing came in several forms - the attack of bandits, the collapse of the family home, the loss of business, the illness, the taunting wife, and the scathing, unbelieving friends. We see the same happening with Jesus.

Let us begin with Luke's account. Immediately after the temptations in the wilderness Jesus goes back to his own town in Nazareth. He enters the synagogue and reads from the prophet Isaiah, the same book from which God quoted at Jesus' baptism and declares that he is the promised Servant King. What do his friends and neighbours say? 'Wonderful news. God is so good we are going to be set free after all?' Hardly! In Luke 4:28 we read that they were furious and set out to throw him off a cliff. It would have been so easy for Jesus to have given up there and then. To feel that sense of alienation and fury from your friends is not easy to bear is it? Much better to accommodate and tone the thing down. Remember Job felt that too, he felt the rage of his so called friends.

Even worse is when it is your family. In Luke 8:19 Jesus mother and brothers came to 'see him' as he was surrounded by the crowds. That is a nice way of putting it. Mark tells us they thought he had gone slightly mad and went to take him back

home. That is a real test isn't it when family turn against you, as did Job's wife. Do you give up then?

Later in Luke 11 it is the religious leaders' turn. They have seen his exorcisms but it doesn't fit into their neat theology that this carpenter from Galilee can be the promised Messiah, any more than it could fit the neat theology of Job's friends that he was innocent. So an alternative 'explanation' has to be found. And they found it. Jesus himself must be possessed by Satan. To be accused of being a sinner like Job was bad enough, but to be accused of being the devil incarnate would be more than any sensitive soul could bear. But Jesus endures it.

But what happens when it is one of your closest friends who suggests an easier way of fulfilling God's will? In Matthew 16 we read that no sooner had Peter declared Jesus to be the coming King, the Christ, than he rebukes Jesus for talking about going to a cross. How does Jesus reply? In verse 23 we read, 'Get behind me, *Satan!* You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God but human concerns.' *Peter* is now Satan's mouthpiece. To get Jesus to leave his mission would discredit him before God. And on the testing goes, day in, day out relentlessly for three solid years until eventually we come to that dark night in Gethsemane when Jesus felt the loneliest man in the world, stricken with sheer terror as he contemplated what was to come - the cross. Satan was very busy that night. He had already entered the soul of one of Jesus' closest disciples - Judas. He was already bringing the chief priests and soldiers to arrest him. He had already weakened the will of Pilate so that political expediency would take precedence over proper justice. For years he had honed the torturing skills of the Roman soldiers to ensure the maximum pain in scourging and crucifixion. And do we not hear his voice again and again as the crowd swarm around Jesus like jackals circling their prey, 'He saved others', they cried, 'But he can't save himself. Let him come down from the cross and then we will believe he is the King' the same temptation as in the wilderness - perform a miraculous stunt.

Do you remember what it was that hurt Job the most in his sufferings? Not so much the taunts or the boils, not even the loss of his family, it was the absence of God. Oh, how he wanted to meet

God. And on that desolate cross, wracked with pain, bearing away the guilt of an entire world we hear him cry, 'My God, my God why have you forsaken me?' It was that god-forsakenness that crushed Job and it was that god-forsakenness which crushed Jesus. Job declared, 'The hand of God has struck me' (19:21). Jesus was to feel the full weight of that hand in striking him as he bore away our sin.

At the root of all of Job's struggles was his desire for justice, to be vindicated by God in full view of his friends, for God to say: 'Yes, my servant is innocent and not guilty as you have falsely charged.' So how was Jesus to be declared innocent? How was his saving work on the cross to be shown to be accepted by God, that Jesus is indeed the King, the Son of God as David was his son? The answer: by the resurrection: Romans 1:4 says that Jesus 'was declared with power to be the Son of God, by his resurrection from the dead.' Job was right when he declared 'I know that my redeemer lives.' Although he didn't realise it at the time for it was something which lay in the future, his redeemer, and ours, was Jesus.

And so we come to the completion of God's plan as summarised by the writer to the Hebrews in chapter 2. There is now a man who reigns over the world and will reign over the new world to come and that is Jesus. He shared our humanity to destroy the one who has power over death - the devil - so death need not hold us in its icy grip. Because death meant judgement, the accuser saying to God, condemn him; condemn her to hell for they have failed. But now, as the writer goes on to tell us there is a high priest who died in their place as an atoning sacrifice. God can therefore point to his Son and say, 'Yes, they failed, but he has succeeded. You have no right to condemn these people anymore. My righteous anger has already been spent on him, never to be repeated again on all who belong to my Son. He is their advocate and you have no right to be their accuser.' And just as Job's family was restored to him a hundred-fold, so is Jesus' family with billions and billions saved from hell and ready for heaven. Ready to share his inheritance of ruling a universe with him. That is what the Bible teaches.

Let me say that if you are reading this and have not yet yielded your life to the Lord Jesus Christ,

then suffering will never make any sense to you. If, at rock bottom there is no God, then life has no ultimate purpose and your sufferings and mine are no more significant than the sufferings of a worm. But Christians can say that although we may not understand all the individual suffering and evil that goes on in the world, we do have some explanation, it make some sense. We realise that it is part of living in a world out of kilter with its Maker and is a reminder that this world is not the be all and end all. There is a judgement to come and a world to come, and we need to be ready for that. Jesus makes us ready. What is more, although we all have to undergo testing and suffering, we have a choice: we can go through it with Jesus or without him. We are told, 'Because he himself has suffered when he was tested, he is able to *help* those who are being tested.' So if you are not yet a Christian what is stopping you becoming one? If you are a Christian then thank God that no one is going to drag up your guilty past ever again - you are free.

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