

“YOU HAVE SEEN THE END INTENDED BY THE LORD” (THE STORY OF JOB)

Presented by

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Those of us who are well versed in the Bible are aware of the fact that it contains a wide variety of historical accounts about people down through the ages whose names we remember today because of certain characteristics that they possessed or because of certain events that took place in their lives. For example, if I told you today that I was going to speak to you about the leader of the Israelite Exodus, whose name would immediately come to mind? Moses—right? Of course. If I told you that I was going to talk to you about the queen who uttered those famous words, “If I perish, I perish!,” whose name would spring to mind? Esther—right? Absolutely. If I told you that I was going to discuss the first Christian martyr, whose name would enter your thoughts? Stephen—right? Certainly. If I told you that I was going to preach on the man whose lies and betrayal cost Jesus Christ, the Son of God, His life, whose name would fall from your lips? Judas Iscariot—right? Yes indeed. And if I told you that I was going to present a lesson on the man in the Bible who is known for the suffering he endured, and the patience he showed during that time of suffering in his life, whose name would enter your thoughts? Job—right? Without doubt.

Well, the topic of my sermon today is, in fact, the one man in the Bible who is known worldwide for his patience in the face of suffering—**Job**. I recently studied the captivating story of Job in our Sunday-morning “Journey through the Old Testament” Bible class. I now would like to share with you some of the fascinating facts and pertinent principles that I learned as a result of that study. At the beginning of our class I had no idea that the story of Job was as central to the message of the Bible as it is, or that the lessons taught in the book of Job play such an important part in our Christian lives. But by the time the class was over, I understood both of things very well. For example, the book of James in the New Testament specifically refers to Job when it observes, “We count them blessed who endure. **You have heard of the patience of Job**, and have seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful” (James 5:10-11). Anytime the events in a man’s life have the capability of showing us “the end intended by the Lord,” you can rest assured that those events, and that man’s life, definitely are worthy of our serious attention. And that is exactly the reason I want to share with you today the information I am including in this sermon.

I suspect that most of you listening to me speak today are familiar with the story of Job—to one degree or another. The very first verse of Job introduces us to the book’s main character by telling us, “There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil.” The next few verses go on to tell us that Job had been richly blessed by God. He had 10 children (Job 1:2), 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 oxen, and 500 donkeys—which made him, according to Job 1:3, the “greatest of all the people of the east.”

But all of that was going to change—in practically the twinkling of an eye. Here, according to Job 1:6-12, is how the changes that were about to take place in Job’s life began.

“There was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. And the Lord said to Satan, ‘From where do you come?’ So Satan answered the Lord and said, ‘From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it.’ Then the Lord said to Satan, ‘Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?’ So Satan answered the Lord and said, ‘Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!’ And the Lord said to Satan, ‘Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person.’ So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.”

If you know your Old Testament really well, then you know what happened next. Job 1:13-19 records the following events, which I am summarizing here.

- A messenger ran up to Job and said, “The Sabeans came and stole all of your donkeys and oxen, and then killed your servants. I alone have escaped to tell you these things!”
- Then a second messenger came up to Job and shouted, “The fire of God fell from heaven and burned your sheep and your servants, and I alone have escaped to tell you what happened!”
- A third messenger arrived and reported to Job, “The Chaldeans raided our camp, stole your camels, and killed your servants—and I alone have escaped to tell you this!”
- Then a fourth messenger appeared before Job and said, “Your sons and daughters were enjoying a meal together at their oldest brother’s house when a tornado struck the house, killing all of your children. I alone have escaped to tell you about this terrible tragedy!”

In a matter of minutes—**literally**—Job lost all 10 of his children, all of his livestock, and almost all of his servants. In the time it takes me to tell you about these sad events, Job was reduced from being “the greatest of all the people of the east” to being a sorrowful, childless, destitute pauper. I would like for you to stop and think for just a moment about the seriousness of these events in Job’s life. If multiple tragedies such as these were to suddenly and unexpectedly strike **you**, how would it affect you? How would **you** react? Well, I can tell you how Job reacted—because the Bible goes on to give us that information when it records,

“Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said, ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.’ In all this, Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong” (Job 1:20-22).

Needless to say, this was not the response that Satan had desired or expected! In fact, Job chapter 2 opens with Satan returning to the Lord to have a second discussion with Him about Job that went much like their first conversation. Job 2:4-6 tells us, however, that Satan decided to try a different approach. He said to God, “...All that a man has he will give for his life. Stretch out Your hand now, and touch Job’s bones and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face! So the Lord said to Satan, ‘He is in your hand, but spare his life.’ ”

I suspect that you know what happened next. After Satan had already stripped Job of his children, his livestock, his servants, and all his wealth, he then attacked Job's health. Once Satan was through with Job, here is the horrible physical condition in which the poor fellow found himself.

- He had horribly painful boils on his skin (Job 2:7).
- His skin itched (Job 2:8).
- He became unrecognizable to his friends (Job 2:12).
- He endured terrible depression (3:25).
- His skin was caked with worms and dirt (Job 7:5).
- His eyes became dark (Job 16:16).
- His breath was foul (Job 19:17).
- He experienced massive weight loss (Job 19:20).
- His bones ached (Job 30:17).
- His skin became black, and he was feverish (Job 30:30).

Eventually, even Job's wife came to him and shouted, "**Curse God and die!**" But Job responded to her by saying, "You speak as one of the foolish women. Shall we accept good from God, and not accept adversity?" The Bible then informs us in a rather matter-of-fact fashion that "in all this Job did not sin with his lips" (Job 2:9-10). In fact, Job eventually said of God, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" (Job 13:15).

But the sad saga of Job does not end there. As Job 2:11-13 explains,

"When Job's three friends heard of all this adversity that had come upon him, each one came from his own place—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite—for they had made an appointment together to come and mourn with him and to comfort him. But when they raised their eyes from afar and did not recognize him, they lifted their voices and wept; and each one tore his robe and sprinkled dust on his head toward heaven. So they sat down with Job on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his grief was very great."

When Job finally broke the seven-day-long silence and spoke to his three friends, what response did he get from them? Surely if Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar had come to "comfort" Job, they would have said or done something to try to help him—right? But, in fact, they did exactly the opposite. When it came time for them to speak, they insisted that Job's suffering was some sort of "divine punishment" for terrible sins in his life. Multiple chapters in the book of Job are devoted to their fierce accusations against Job and their constant chastisement of him for his alleged wrongdoings. Job, however, steadfastly maintained his innocence, and contended that his life had **not** been filled with sin. Furthermore, as Job responded to the false accusations of his "friends," he even was so bold as to chastise them for their erroneous conclusions and lack of faith in him when he said, "Miserable comforters are you all!" (Job 16:2).

Eventually, a fourth friend—the young Elihu—decided to speak up. As it turned out, he was the only one of the four who actually had something worthwhile to say. Rather than wrongly accusing Job of sinning, Elihu suggested that perhaps it would be best if Job could find the inner strength to humble himself

before God and figure out a way to use the various trials and tribulations he was enduring to increase his faith and further purify his life.

But Elihu's words were "too little too late." In chapters 29-31 we see Job questioning God and making statements that drew the Lord's ire. God, therefore, as Job 38:1 explains, decided to weigh in on the matters under discussion when He—without any warning whatsoever—"answered Job out of a whirlwind." God's remarks to Job take up **four entire chapters** of the book of Job. Interestingly, most of God's comments to the patriarch came in the form of questions. Job 38:2-3 explains God's intent when it records God as saying to Job, "Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me." In essence God was saying to Job, "You think you are so smart that you dare to question Me and challenge my sovereign control over the Universe that I Myself created?! If you are **that** smart, Job, then you should have no trouble whatsoever answering these questions."

If you have never read the questions that God asked Job in chapters 38-41, you should. There are more than fifty of them! God asked Job, for example:

- "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the world? Who determined its measurements? On what were its foundations laid? Or who laid the cornerstone. Surely you know!"
- "Have you understood the vast expanses of the earth?"
- "Have you entered the springs of the sea? Or have you walked in search of the depths?"
- "From whose womb comes the ice? And the frost of heaven, who gives it birth?"
- "Have you given the horse strength? Does the hawk fly by your wisdom, and spread its wings towards the south in winter?"
- "Have you seen the great dinosaur that I made along with you? He eats grass like an ox, his tail swings like a cedar tree, his bones are tubes of bronze, and his limbs are like bars of iron."
- "Who has put wisdom in the mind, or understanding to the heart?"

Job, of course, could not answer a single one of God's questions. [And for the record, we today—even with all of the cumulative human knowledge and advanced scientific technology at our fingertips—still can answer only a handful of those same questions!] Through God's questions, He got His point across to Job in an incredibly powerful manner: **When Job questioned God, he did not know what he was talking about!** In fact, Job ended up having to admit that when he apologetically said to God,

"I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You.... I have uttered what I did not understand—things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.... I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:1-3,5-6).

In the end, Job learned some truly valuable lessons about the sovereignty of God and about his need to totally trust the Lord. In fact, as the book ends, we see Job being restored to health, happiness, and prosperity that was greater than that which he had enjoyed before Satan took all of those things away from him.

The material found in the book of Job helps us to grasp and understand a number of important principles.

- First, Satan is alive and well, and is working in the world. In 2 Corinthians 4:4 the apostle Paul referred to Satan when he wrote of those whom “the **god of this age** has blinded.”
- Second, God (Who is omnipotent—Genesis 17:1; Job 42:2; Matthew 19:26) has power over what Satan can and cannot do. In fact, it is interesting to note that during the devil’s temptation of Christ (Luke 4:1-13), he admitted that his earthly reign had been “delivered unto” him (Luke 4:6). Moreover, the apostle John observed, “He who is in you [God] is greater than he who is in the world [Satan]” (1 John 4:4).
- Third, sometimes it is beyond our human ability to comprehend all the “whys” behind the suffering that occurs in our world. Even after all the suffering Job had endured, by the time the book of Job came to an end he still had not been told by God why such things had happened to him.
- Fourth, eventually the wicked will receive their just dues. “‘Vengeance is Mine; I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Romans 12:19).
- Fifth, we cannot always blame suffering on our lifestyles. The truth is that on occasion suffering may enter our lives to purify, test, teach, or strengthen us.
- Sixth, God deserves our love and praise in all circumstances of our lives, not just when things are going well.

The book of Job serves as a reminder to us that there is a “cosmic conflict” going on behind the scenes, about which we often know nothing. We may wonder at times why God permits certain things to happen; or we may question or doubt God’s goodness. But we do such things because we cannot see or comprehend the full picture. God, however, **can** and **does**!

The book of Job also teaches us to trust God under **all** circumstances. We must trust God, not only when we **do** understand, but especially when we do **not** understand. The psalmist aptly reminded us, “As for God, His way is perfect” (Psalm 18:30). If God’s ways are “perfect,” then we can trust that whatever He does or allows also is perfect.

As Abraham asked God, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Genesis 18:25). As “the Judge of all the earth” Who is “perfect,” of course God **always** will “do right!” This may not seem possible to us, but our minds are not the same as God’s mind, as He reminded us when He said, “‘My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ says the Lord. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isaiah 55:8-9). For our part, our responsibility to God is to obey Him, trust Him, and submit to His will—a lesson that Job **finally** learned (and that we today would do well to learn as well).