

October 7, 2012  
Satan's Favorite Lies

## **Suffering Should be Avoided**

Job 1:1-3, 6-12

### **Opening words:**

A creed is a profession of faith. When you recite a creed, you are telling the world what you believe is the truth. Most of time, we recite the Apostle's Creed. It can be dated back to the year 390. Tradition tells us the Apostle's, themselves, contributed that creed. Today, we recited the Nicene Creed. It is older. It can be dated back to the year 325. Tradition, tells us 318 early church leaders gathered to write those word. They were not an attractive group. Fewer the twelve 12 had not lost an eye or lost a hand or did not limp on a leg lamed by torture for their Christian faith. The church has experienced suffering for a long time.

This is sermon number four in my seven part sermon series, *Satan's Favorite Lies*. We are looking at the lies Satan is spreading in the world to weaken our faith. They may be logical but they are not Biblical. Do you remember the first three? We began with the lie: *God cannot be trusted*. The next week we exposed the lie: *Some things cannot be forgiven*. Last week we exposed the lie: *God grades on a curve*. Today, we are going to expose the lie: *Suffering should be avoided*. We are instructed today from the Old Testament, Job 1:1-3, 6-12. May God give you ears to hear.

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### **Job 1:1-3, 6-12**

1 In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. 2 He had seven sons and three daughters, 3 and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East.

6 One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. 7 The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it." 8 Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." 9 "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. 10 "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. 11 But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." 12 The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger."

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In 1962, Victor and Mildred Goertzel published a study called Cradles of Eminence. The book was a revealing study of 413 "famous and exceptionally gifted people." They spent years attempting to understand what produced greatness, what common thread

might run through all of these outstanding people's lives. Surprisingly, the most outstanding fact was that virtually all of them, 392 of the 413, had to overcome very difficult obstacles in order to become who they were. What major obstacles have you had to overcome in your life? If you can think of just one obstacle say, "**Amen!**" We are instructed today from an individual who knew a thing or two about suffering. His name is Job.

During the summer months it has become my custom to preach on a single Old Testament character. Several years ago, I considered preaching through the life of Job. I began reading the book as a whole then I reconsidered my decision. I reconsidered my decision because his story is full of hardship. No one wants to hear about pain and suffering during the summer months. People come to church weighed down with their own problems. They are looking for some liberation. However, that doesn't mean Job's story doesn't speak to us today. His story reminds us of three divine truths. It is those three truths I want to look at today. These are the three:

1. Suffering is a part of life
2. Suffering changes our vision
3. Suffering enhances our witness.

So if you are ready to begin say, "**Amen!**"

### **Suffering is a Part of Life**

This is divine truth number one. Suffering is a part of life. Is anyone surprised by this divine truth? You know it is true. Life is hard. Life is filled with hardships and suffering. Life has always been hard; life will always be hard. One of the things I was encouraged to do in seminary was develop a strong theology of suffering. Why do bad things happen to good people? My theology of suffering revolves the Old Testament lesson for today, Job. Let us look at the text together.

We are in the first chapter of Job. Verse three summarizes his life prior to our reading. It says, "*He (Job) was the greatest man among all the people of the East.*" No one can question that statement. It appears Job had the perfect life. He was a good man who was blameless and flawless. He feared God and shunned evil. He had seven sons, the perfect number. He had wealth. His life was perfect and he deserved the perfection. It would have continued if not for one imperfect being, Satan.

Verses six through twelve changed everything about Job's life. According to the text, the angels present themselves to God. In their company is Satan. God questioned his presence and begins to dialogue with him. We learn Satan has been roaming the world. God asks Satan if he has encountered Job. It is clear that God is impressed with Job. Satan has encountered Job but he is not so impressed. He believes Job's faith is shallow. Satan believes Job is a man of faith only because he has this perfect life. Why wouldn't Job follow God's ways? After all, good things should happen to good people. It is at this point that Satan proposes a little test. He believes Job will reject God the moment some hardship enters into his life. Let me say this clearly. God believes in Job. He says his commitment is not shallow, it is deep. In the face of great hardship and suffering, Job will remain faithful.

Hardships and suffering will not rip Job out of the ever-loving arms of God. The rest the book is filled with Job's hardship and suffering. In the end, Job loses everything but his faith in God.

This is my theology of suffering. The origin of all the bad things in this world is Satan. Every day we forced to play the part of Job. How much hardship have you experienced in your life? How much suffering have you experienced in your life? How much sadness have you experienced in your life? Satan sends those things your way to rip you out of the ever loving arms of God. However, it is not going to work. This is divine truth number one. Suffering maybe part of life but it is not going to erode our faith. Just the contrary! They are going to work our spiritual muscles so we stand closer to God! If you need God more today than ever before then say, **"Amen!"** Divine truth number one is suffering is a part of life. Divine truth number two is suffering changes our vision.

### **Suffering Changes our Vision**

Stephen Hawking is brilliant! You know his story. He is an astrophysicist at Cambridge University. Many consider him the most intelligent man in the world. He has advanced the general theory of relativity farther than any person since Albert Einstein. Mentally, he is brilliant. Physically, he is weak. Hawking has lived in a wheelchair for years because he has ALS Syndrome (Lou Gehrig's disease). I hate to say it but that disease will eventually take his life. From his wheelchair he can do little more than sit and think. He is too weak to write, feed himself, comb his hair or fix his glasses. Hawking has even lost the ability even to speak, and now he communicates with the help of a computer. Yet, his personality shines through the messy details of his existence. Hawking said that before he became ill, he had very little interest in life. He called it a "pointless existence" resulting from sheer boredom. He drank too much and did very little work. Then he learned he had ALS Syndrome and was not expected to live more than two years. The ultimate effect of that diagnosis, beyond its initial shock, was extremely positive. He claimed to have been happier after he was afflicted by the disease. Hawking said, "When one has nearly everything taken away, one really appreciates everything that one does have." In other words, to a man like Hawking who thought he would soon die quickly; everything takes on meaning--a sunrise or a walk in a park or the laughter of children. Suddenly, each small pleasure becomes precious. By contrast, those who believe life owes them a free ride are often discontent with its finest gifts.

How much of your life are you taking for granted? In suffering we learn to appreciate life's simplest things. Divine truth number two says suffering changes our vision. What would you miss if it was suddenly taken away? If that makes you think say, **"Amen!"** Divine truth number one is suffering is a part of life. Divine truth number two is suffering changes our vision. Divine truth number three is suffering enhances our witness.

### **Suffering Enhances our Witness**

A man once testified in one of D.L. Moody's meetings that he had lived "on the Mount of Transfiguration" for five years. "How many souls did you lead to Christ last year?"

Moody bluntly asked him. "Well," the man hesitated, "I don't know." "Have you saved any?" Moody persisted. "I don't know that I have," the man admitted.

"Well," said Moody, "we don't want that kind of mountaintop experience. When a man gets up so high that he cannot reach down and save poor sinners, there is something wrong." Suffering enhances our Christian witness. If you don't believe me then look at Jesus, himself.

You know the old Gospel story. Jesus was born in the ordinary way yet he lived that extraordinary life. He never committed a single and loved everyone. Those things were more than his enemies could tolerate. They arranged to have Jesus arrested. They arranged for Jesus to be put on trial. They arranged to have Jesus executed, like a common criminal. His suffering was so deep it still makes us uncomfortable still today. Yet, when you imagine standing next to the cross of Jesus, when you image looking into the face of Jesus, there can be no question how much he loves you. There is no question how much Jesus loves us! Can anyone here question Jesus' witness? Can anyone question your witness? Like it or not, suffering enhances our witness. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**" Let me end where we began.

Job's story lasts for 42 chapters. If you read each chapter you discover Job loses every of personal value. In his life there was no shortage of suffering and hardship. However, those experiences did not shake his faith in God. Consider this fact with me. If Job's life would have continued flawless then he would have just lived and died. He would have been forgotten in history. Why do we remember Job? We remember Job as a man of faith, in spite of his suffering and hardships. How will the future remember you? Will Satan rip you out of the loving arms of God? Or will you remained as a person of faith? Helen Keller spent her life completely blind. She said these words, "*Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.*" And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"