

July 14, 2019

The Life of Job
Passing the Test
Job 1:6-12

Opening words: Deep is the Old Testament is the Book of Job. The entire book is a poem, written by an unknown author. Alfred Lloyd Tennyson (1809-1862) called Job, "*The greatest poem of ancient or modern times.*" However, it is not just a poem. It is an epic poem. This type of literature is not intended to simply give us an account of a real character, but rather it is a God-inspired poetic dramatization meant to teach a divine lesson. This poem teaches us about theodicy – the vindication of the justice of God in the light of human suffering. Job is a rich theological work setting out a variety of perspectives. However, this is the bottom line:

The Book of Job is universal. Everyone knows the basic storyline, and everyone can relate. The reason is obvious. Life is not easy, and everyone has problems. Some are just better at hiding their problems. What problems keep you up at night? We have all asked the question, why do bad things happen to good people? Why do bad things happen to us? My goal in this sermon series is to help you answer that question. Our scripture reading for this morning is Job 1:6-12. Let me call this message *Passing the Test*.

Job 1:6-12 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." Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

Chuck Swindoll (born 1934) is a Christian evangelical pastor, educator and radio preacher. He founded *Insight for Living*, which airs on 2,000 radio stations in 15 different countries around the world. He once said, "*Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it.*" I cannot disagree with that quote. If you find some truth in that quote, say, "**Amen!**"

Once again, we find ourselves in the first chapter of Job. When we last left him, Job had a good life. He was rich in resources and relationships. His good life begins to

change in our reading for today, which is a conversation between God and Satan. According to the text, angels came to present themselves before God. Along with them came Satan himself. God inquires where Satan has been. The Dark One answers freely; he has been roaming the earth. It is God who highlights Job. He is the model for all human life. He is blameless and upright; he fears God and shuns evil. Satan scoffs at God's observation. Satan basically says, "Why shouldn't Job do everything you require? After all, you have given him everything he desires." So to speak, Satan calls out God. He challenges the Almighty. Satan believes Job's pious ways will stop the moment his good life is interrupted by hardship. God gives Satan permission to test Job. Let me say this clearly:

Satan asks to test Job for one reason. It is the same reason Satan tests us. His greatest desire is to damage our relationship with God. Satan tests us regularly. That is why the news outlets are filled with painful, sad stories. Can I be honest with you? When I compiled the following stories, I found myself becoming emotional.

In the fall of 1984, I received a phone call that tested my faith. My Uncle Bob, who had flown his private plane for years safely, decided to take his extended family up. It was his normal custom. I remember, he took me up once. On that day, he took up his daughter-in-law and her two brothers. The fun ended quickly when his engine stalled during take-off. There were no survivors. It was unbelievable, and for a short time we lived in denial. Just think about it. My Aunt Phyllis lost the love of her life. She has never remarried. Uncle Bob's daughter-in-law left behind an infant daughter, who does remember her. A mother and father lost their three children in a matter of seconds. There is no happy ending to this story. You can blame my Uncle Bob, or you can blame his mechanic, but that doesn't take away the shock. Our world has a surplus of suffering.

In March of 2002, my wife was driving a Youngstown State University van. The group was returning from a Habitat trip to Florida. The weather was bad, and I was worried. The good news is, they arrived home safely. That wasn't the story for a van from Bowling Green State University. They were driving home from Florida too. Everyone was having a great time until they got twenty-five miles south of Cincinnati. The rain was heavy, and the driver was driving too fast. The van began to hydroplane and slammed into a truck. Everyone was taken to the hospital, but only the driver survived. How do you live the rest of your life knowing you are responsible for the death of six friends? There is no happy ending to this story. You can blame the driver, but it doesn't take away the pain. Our world has a surplus of suffering. That story tests my faith.

In 2007, teenage sisters were in Pompano Beach, Florida on vacation. They thought it would be fun to go parasailing. They did, and they did have fun, until it happened. The rigging broke loose from the boat. The girls drifted into a nearby building. On impact, the girl sitting on the inside seat died. The girl sitting on the outside seat lived. There are no words, only questions. How do you live the rest of your life without your sister?

There is no happy ending to this story. It is easy to blame the parasail operator, but it doesn't take away the pain. Our world has a surplus of suffering. That story tests my faith.

On July 5 of this year, the Salt Lake City Police Department announced they had found the body of 23-year-old Mackenzie Lueck. Her remains were found in Logan Canyon, 90 miles north of Salt Lake City. She was a student at the University of Utah and had been missing for several weeks. A 31-year-old man, Ayoola Ajayi, was taken into custody and charged with murder. According to her cell phone records, he was her last call at 3:00 AM. You can blame Mackenzie. Nothing good happens at 3:00 AM. You can blame Ajayi. However, that doesn't take away the pain. Our world has a surplus of suffering. That story tests my faith.

Earlier this week, the news came out. A one-and-a-half-year-old girl from Indiana fell to her death on a cruise ship. It is every grandfather's nightmare. The extended family was taking a cruise together. Everyone was having a great time until the family went to dinner on the eleventh floor. The maternal grandfather, Salvatore Anello, was watching the little girl. For some unknown reason, he sat her on an open window, when he lost his grip. The little girl fell to her death. How do you live the rest of your life, knowing you let your granddaughter fall to her death? It is easy to blame the grandfather, but that doesn't take away the pain. Our world has a surplus of suffering. That story tests my faith. Let me give you one more example.

For the past decade, every major mainline Protestant denomination has wrestled with the issue of sexuality. The United Methodist Church is no exception. I have no clue how much time and money has been spent on the topic. Some have called it the slavery issue of our time. It is a topic we will never agree upon. Did you know that 4.2% of our population falls into the LGBTQ category? (That figure may be high.) Did you know 80% of the world's population lives on ten dollars a day or less? Not a single word has been uttered on their behalf. That is not just wrong; it is a sin. If you want to experience true suffering in this world, then look at those who are living in true poverty. How much money do you spend in a single day? Our world has a surplus of suffering. Our inactivity tests my faith. If you will admit there is a surplus of pain and suffering in our world, say, **"Amen"**.

At home, we have been debating the topic of suffering. It has stretched me. Do you believe Satan creates all the suffering in the world? Or do you believe Satan uses the suffering in the world, and bad things just happen? Honestly, I'm just not sure, but I do know all the suffering in our world tests our faith. The question is, as a disciple of Jesus Christ, are you going to pass the test? I can't eliminate all the hardship and suffering in your life, but I can give you three pieces of pastoral advice. The next time you feel your faith tested, remember these three things:

1. **God is with you!** I have said it a million times. There has never been a moment in your life when you have been orphaned. Do you remember the Great Commission? Jesus is speaking to the disciples for the last time. He tells them to go out and make more disciples, and he makes a great promise. It is a promise that is still in effect today. The Master said, *"I am with you always, to the end of the age"* (Matthew 28:10). *Never* forget it. God is with you! If you promise to remember God is always with you, say, **"Amen!"**
2. **God believes in you!** First Corinthians 10:13 says, *"And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it."* That Bible verse is loaded. God must really believe in us, because we are forced to endure so much. Never forget it. God believes in you! If you promise to remember that God believes in you, say, **"Amen!"**
3. **God loves you!** 1 John 3:1 says, *"See what great love God the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God."* God loves you so much, he found a way to spend eternity with us. If you have ever questioned God's love for you, then look at Jesus hanging on the cross. Never forget it. God loves you! If you promise to remember God loves you, say, **"Amen!"**

One of the great names in America today is Ted Turner (born 1938). We have looked at him in the past. He is an American media mogul and philanthropist. He owns CNN and the Atlanta Braves, among other things. His personal past is interesting. He was raised in a strict Christian home and jokes that he was saved several times. That faith was tested early in his life when his sister contracted a fatal disease. Ted admits he prayed to save his sister, but she died. Ted Turner reacted like many have reacted. He was mad at God and decided there wasn't a God. The happiest person on that day was Satan. He had damaged Ted Turner's relationship with God to the point that Ted Turner didn't believe there was a God. Financially, Ted Turner is a success. His net worth is \$2.2 billion. Spiritually, Ted Turner is bankrupt. He failed the test and is a self-proclaimed atheist. Today, Ted Turner is eighty years old and believes in absolutely nothing. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) once said, *"To live is to suffer, to survive is to find some meaning in the suffering."* And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

By your presence here today, I am assuming you have passed the test. There is no vaccine against pain and hardship. Sooner or later, they will enter our lives and when they do, we will run to God. Because, either you have God in your life, or you have nothing at all. Do you remember the quote from Chuck Swindoll? He once said, *"Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it."* How do you respond to the pain and suffering in this world? If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"**