

July 13, 2008  
Pentecost 9

*"Praising God in Good Times and Bad"*

**JOB 1:1**

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**I**n the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. <sup>2</sup> He had seven sons and three daughters, <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> His sons used to take turns holding feasts in their homes, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. <sup>5</sup> When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have them purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom. <sup>6</sup> One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. <sup>7</sup> The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it." <sup>8</sup> 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." <sup>9</sup> "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. <sup>10</sup> "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. <sup>11</sup> But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." <sup>12</sup> The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger." Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD. <sup>13</sup> One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, <sup>14</sup> a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, <sup>15</sup> and the Sabeans attacked and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" <sup>16</sup> While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" <sup>17</sup> While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" <sup>18</sup> While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, "Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, <sup>19</sup> when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" <sup>20</sup> At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship <sup>21</sup> and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." <sup>22</sup> In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

This past week we had a Bible lesson in Star Bible Camp about Paul and Silas being badly

beaten and thrown into prison. We were amazed at how they were able to sing praises to God for all the blessings that they had received, even though they were in prison and in terrible pain. We enjoyed singing the earthquake song with the words, "Paul and Silas were chained in jail, though blood was on their back. Their songs and hymns and praises to God sent angels to the attack."

Before us the morning we have the example of Job. Here was a man who lost almost everything yet he was able to praise God with the famous words, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord!" Job is also well known for another time when he praised God in the deepest pit of despair with the words, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God."

The book of James praises the patience of Job. Maybe you have even heard someone say, "That person has the patience of Job." If you only know Job for the good things he said, you really don't know Job. Job once cursed the day of his birth. It was Job who said angrily against God, "He assails me and tears me in his anger and gnashes his teeth at me." The story of Job is really more about the patience of God than it is the patience of Job. For always in the deepest darkest pit, the love of our God is always deeper. The same Lord God who strengthened Job to praise him in good times and bad will also strengthen you as well.

### **The Lord strengthens us for the good times**

Job is described as the greatest man among all the people of the East. He owned 7000 sheep for food, clothing and milk. He had 500 yoke of oxen to plow thousands of acres of land. He had 500 donkeys. He had a large number of servants to till the fields, process the wool, gather the crops. His 3000 camels brought riches across the desert sands.

Job's greatest treasure was not his vast wealth, but his life of devotion and praise to God who blessed him so richly. It says that Job was blameless and upright. That does not mean he was perfect for the Bible makes it clear that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Job looked blameless in the eyes of the community. His love for the Lord led him to be generous with other people. Later he would say this about the privilege of using his wealth to benefit others. "Whoever heard of me, spoke well of me, I rescued the poor... the man who was dying blessed me. I made the widow's heart sing...I was eyes to the blind, feet to lame." When Job walked into the market place people stopped talking. Even the little boys stopped playing and said with hushed voices, "There goes Job." It seems that the more he gave away to help others, the more the Lord blessed with more money to be a blessing to even more people.

Job was blessed with a wonderful family. He had seven sons and three daughters. These 10 children did not spend their time on this earth fighting over dad's vast wealth. They all got along. They were close to each other and close to their dad and mom, and close to the Lord. Every Christian family on the face of this earth has longed and yearned and prayed for the kind of family life that Job had. This great man of God never stopped being a spiritual leader for his family. When they all got together for family gatherings in their different homes with good food and wine, Job would offer sacrifices to the Lord, praying

for his kids and grandkids that the Lord would forgive them if they had become careless in what they said or how they lived their lives. He said to himself, "Perhaps my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." Literally the Hebrew says that they failed to bless God in their hearts. I like what the author of the *People's Bible* says about Job and his relationship to his children. "He neither planned their parties, nor did he interfere with them, but he did have a true fatherly concern for their spiritual welfare." The Lord gave him the strength to give full glory and honor to the Lord in the eyes of his children even though he had such vast wealth and riches.

It is so easy to lose touch with the Lord when prosperity comes into your life. Remember what the Lord told his people as they prepared to enter the Promised Land. "When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God." In our sermon last week, we heard about the sower and the seed. Some of the seed developed into a beautiful plant but then it was choked by the weeds which symbolized the cares and riches of this life that can become more important than the Lord.

Job was able to keep everything in the right balance or perspective. The blessings he received never became more important to him than the Lord. Listen again to the words of Psalm 103 which really put all of our lives in the right perspective. "Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits- who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, and redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion." There are so many benefits or blessings that have come into your life again this past week. You have homes in which to live, beds in which to sleep, water to drink, food to eat, more than enough clothes to wear and even sophisticated electronics. These benefits from the Lord pale in comparison to the joy of knowing that our sins have been forgiven.

This past we had the privilege of telling our children that God expects us to be perfect to be loved by him and have eternal life with him that goes on forever and ever. Children learned that sin was falling short of God's perfection and no one is perfect. They learned that Jesus washes us clean from our sin and gives us a robe of righteousness to cover us. That allows us to be redeemed from the pit and to be crowned with love and compassion every day of our lives. That's what made Job's life special. He knew that his Redeemer was alive and he would stand before him, not because of all the good things he had done, but only because of what his Redeemer had done for him.

Imagine for a moment that this brick I am holding was actually pure gold. If you filled this room with such gold bricks, it would be comparable to the wealth of either Bill Gates or Warren Buffett. Yet, all his wealth is worth less than this tiny grain of sand compared to the riches we have in Christ Jesus our Savior whose mercy or love endures forever. "O give thanks unto the Lord for he is good and his mercy endures for ever." The Lord who gave Job the ability to praise him in the good times will also give you this same blessing and perspective on life.

### **The Lord gives the strength to praise him in the bad times**

The good times did not last for Job, and they will not always last for us. Some of you have

already experienced more than you share of problems, pain and suffering in your life. It bothers us that Satan comes and seeks permission from the Lord to wreak havoc on the life of Job. It bothers us that Satan can taunt the Lord with the words, "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. Stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." It bothers us that the Lord allows Satan to strike Job with afflictions. But always the Lord has limitations on what Satan is allowed to do. Troubles will come to us in life, but the Lord is always on his throne as the Lord said to us in our psalm that we sang this morning, "Be still and know that I am God, I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

It almost takes our breath away and causes us to gasp as we look in horror at how a freak sequence of events takes almost everything away from Job in one terrible day. This is certainly not normal. A messenger comes to Job with the news that the Sabeans attacked the servants who were in charge of the oxen and donkeys, killing the servants and taking all the oxen and donkeys. While that person was still speaking, another comes with the report that some unusual fire of God from the sky had destroyed all the sheep and the servants who were watching them, with only one servant escaping to bring the sad news. While he was still speaking, the report comes in that the Chaldeans had stolen all the camels and also destroyed the servants who were watching them. While he was still speaking the sad news comes that a windstorm from the desert had destroyed the house where his children were feasting and all died.

Imagine a day in your life when your stocks all suddenly plunge to zero, your bank closes its doors, your job is eliminated, your home is destroyed in a fire, your car is stolen and your children who are all visiting you for your birthday suddenly and mysteriously take sick and die. Under such circumstances it is very hard to say with the Psalmist David, "This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it."

Job tore his robes and shaved his head to show his grief and anguish. It is OK to cry when you lose someone you love, or even lose your home in a tragic fire, or even a family pet that you loved so much. Never say to someone grieving, "Don't cry." But notice what Job does in his grief. It says, "He fell to the ground in worship." It was the Lord who gave him the strength to say, "Naked I came from mother's womb and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised!"

It has been said that life is a series of hills and valleys, ups and downs. Another person once said that the good times and bad times are more often like two parallel rails of a train track. We experience both simultaneously. I think I am safe in saying none of us will ever go through what Job experienced. What we can be sure of is the unfailing love and mercy of our loving Shepherd that enables us to say, "Goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our life and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Amen.