

SERMON

Job's Rollercoaster Trials (Job 1:1-22)

This evening we begin a new series, a series on the person Job. I was introduced to Job very early on in my life. It was when I was living in Early, a suburb of Reading, Berkshire, which I did from the tender age of 4 until I moved to Essex when I was 10. It was in Essex that I learnt all my bad habits! I was introduced as I said to Job every morning, every morning Job would come down the road to our house, or at least that is what my parents told me, and on his vehicle it said his name. Job was the name of the local dairy and we got our daily delivery from him!!

This evening we begin a new series, a series on Job, not the milkman, but the Job of the Bible. This is one of those books that many people know the story, sort of, especially Job and his friends, but not so many people have actually read it. Well over the next few weeks, we will be going through the book of Job, not word for word, chapter by chapter, under the overall heading of

Job – an Outstanding Character.

And today we are looking at a title of Job's Rollercoaster Trials. I just could not resist this picture. She looks like she is having so much fun!

We are introduced to Job and his character right at the start of the book that bears his name. Verse 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." (Job 1:1 NIV)

The only mention of Job outside of the book of Job is in the prophet Ezekiel who writes

"The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, if a country sins against me by being unfaithful and I stretch out my hand against it to cut off its food supply and send famine upon it and kill its men and their animals, even if these three men—Noah, Daniel and Job—were in it, they could save only themselves by their righteousness, declares the Sovereign LORD.

"Or if I send wild beasts through that country and they leave it childless and it becomes desolate so that no-one can pass through it because of the beasts, as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, even if these three men were in it, they could not save their own sons or daughters. They alone would be saved, but the land would be desolate.

"Or if I bring a sword against that country and say, 'Let the sword pass throughout the land,' and I kill its men and their animals, as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, even if these three men were in it, they could not save their own sons or daughters. They alone would be saved.

"Or if I send a plague into that land and pour out my wrath upon it through bloodshed, killing its men and their animals, as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, even if Noah, Daniel and Job were in it, they could save neither son nor daughter. They would save only themselves by their righteousness."

(Ezekiel 14:12-20 NIV)

So we have Job lumped together with Noah and Daniel, both men of great faith, both of outstanding character and so Job is in good company.

So we have in this first verse which states that Job comes from Uz. Where is Uz? In the books there are conflicting ideas, so the answer is we do not really know. It is only mentioned in three verses in the Old Testament, this being one of them.

However we are also told that Job is **blameless and upright** and man who **fears God and shuns evil** (Job 1:1). Does this mean that he is perfect, that he is sinless, something that we can never live up to? Of course not. We read in verse 5

"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."

Job would sacrifice, just in case for his children. Therefore he knew that one could sin inadvertently even if one was good, or blameless. We too can be blameless, and before God we are blameless because of the blood of Christ, the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, but we are not sinless. We need to confess before God that we are sinners as we have done this evening, even when we feel that we have not sinned, because we can never know, but we are always forgiven.

We also know that Job was a big family man with a big family of 7 sons and 3 daughters, but that he and his wife did not go to the feasts of their children – he did not crowd his children, but looked out for them, as shown by the sacrifice for them each week. There were good values in this family because the sons would take it in turns to hold the feast, and they would invite their sisters along. Hebrew culture did not necessarily mean that this had to happen because of course Job and his family lived in a culture where sons were far more important than daughters, and for family occasions daughters were often overlooked.

So Job is blameless, but not sinless, has a large family and is very wealthy as we can see from the list of his possessions in verse 3. Job owned

- Seven thousand sheep.
- Three thousand camels.
- Five hundred yoke of oxen, so this was probably a thousand as a yoke was a pair.
- Five hundred female donkeys, because these were more valuable than male donkeys because they gave milk. So sons were better than daughters, but female donkeys better than male ones – what a strange world we can live in!

He also, we are told, had a large number of servants. In fact he was as the verse finishes off

"... He was the greatest man among all the people of the East."

(Job 1:3 NIV)

So Job was seriously wealthy. And for the Hebrew mind this meant that he was being greatly blessed by God. And of course we have Christians today who will tell you that Christians are meant to have money, to have wealth because God will bless them abundantly and so if you are poor, then God is not blessing you because you have done something wrong, you have sin in your life, you are against God somehow.

Those people have never read Psalm 73 where we read

“Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills.” (Psalms 73:1-5 NIV)

The wrong people are being blessed with wealth and not the righteous ones! So wealth and God's blessing are linked together, but lack of wealth does not necessarily mean that one is not enjoying God's blessing.

So the character of Job is introduced, but then the scene changes. A bit like those TV dramas when the action seems to be in two or more places at once and you hope that it will in time make sense. We now have a royal court and this conversation between God and Satan. What has Satan been doing? Verse 7

“... roaming through the earth and going to and fro in it.” (Job 1:7 NIV)

Satan loves to roam and get at those who are following God. He does not have to worry about the ones who don't follow God, he has them already, but he roams the earth trying to trap Christians, trying to make them renounce their faith. I know it does not say that but then why would God say

“... ‘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.’” (Job 1:8 NIV)

God is proud of Job and Satan has noticed Job, he was a potential victim, but did not fall. As I read this I found myself asking myself the question, “Would God be proud of me?” Remember that we do not have to be sinless for God to be proud of us; we have to be blameless and upright and follow God and shun evil. Could that be said of you, of me?

This last week we have been looking after our grandson, Noah. It has been a great joy for us and we are so proud of him. He is happy, cooperative, goes to bed when you say the word bed, usually, and then sleeps for some thirteen hours! But he has his moments when he is grumpy, stubborn, downright belligerent, but we are still proud of him overall. He is not perfect, but overall he is wonderful – but we may be bias, just a tad!

Hopefully that is how God looks at us, but does he?

But then Satan comes back with a retort, because he has obviously seen Job and looked at Job for he says, verse 9

“‘Does Job fear God for nothing?’ Satan replied. ‘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. But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.’” (Job 1:9-11 NIV)

Or to put it another way

Satan retorted, "So do you think Job does all that out of the sheer goodness of his heart? Why, no one ever had it so good! You pamper him like a pet, make sure nothing bad ever happens to him or his family or his possessions, bless everything he does--he can't lose! "But what do you think would happen if you reached down and took away everything that is his? He'd curse you right to your face, that's what." (Job 1:9-11 MSG)

And in some respects I have sympathy for Satan. Job has everything, so why shouldn't he follow God? He is not suffering hardships, life is sweet. So that leads to the question:

"Why do you follow God?"

One of the things that I noticed when we went to Togo and went out of the city and into the country we would pass different villages. Some villages had a building with a cross sticking out of the top of a building, their church. A group like a Christian aid organisation within the country had gone in, helping the village with clean water and had taken in the gospel with them and had gone on further to help them. The next village we saw had a building with a crescent moon on it, the village mosque. Had the Muslims done a similar thing to the Christians? With the aid came religion. Did the village become Christian or Muslim to keep the aid flowing? I was told by the Togolese Christian Minister that we were with that this did not happen, but I was not so sure I must say.

But there are so called 'Rice Christians' around who follow God for what they can get out of it for themselves. This may be on

- A financial basis – God they feel makes them have enough money, so they remain with God.
- A Social basis – In church are all my friends. Without God I would lose my social base.
- A Status basis – I follow God because I am an important person in my church.
- A Power basis – I follow God because I have power in church

Hopefully you do not follow God for what you get out of it, but for what you can give into it. God calls us to be fellow workers with him, not sponges who take, take and take.

So God says to this accusation

"... 'Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.' ..." (Job 1:12 NIV)

Notice that God does not give Satan total free rein. There is no thought ever of dualism in the Bible. The world is not being fought over by God and Satan – two equal, struggling powers. So the answer to the question asked by the Jehovah's Witness 'Who rules the earth?' The answer is always, 'God.' Yes Satan may roam back and forth across the earth seeking to pervert people, but God is ultimately in control and so anything can happen to Job except harm to Job. Why – because God is on control and God has said so.

Let us never forget that in all things God is sovereign.

So what happens? All on one day with one messenger having brought news to the next messenger bringing news we are told that:

- The oxen and donkeys were gone thanks to an attack from the Sabeans
- The sheep were gone because of a lightning fireball perhaps as it talks of fire from God falling from the sky
- The camels were carried off by the Chaldeans
- His sons and daughters were feasting killed by a tornado

Some day for Job! What would you do? Remember that Job knows nothing of this ‘contest’ between God and Satan. He just has the fact before him. He and his wife have lost his family; they have lost all their wealth. Imagine that you have lost your job because the firm has made you redundant. Imagine that all your savings are with a financial institution that has gone to the wall and your savings are lost. Then on top of all that you have lost all your children and their families. How would you feel? What would you do?

I am not sure if I would do what Job did. Verse 20

“At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: "Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I shall depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.”

(Job 1:20-22 NIV)

He tears his robe and shaves his head as a sign of his distress. He is sad because of his losses, especially I would think his family, this family he loved so much that he would sacrifice for them, just in case.

It is so sad when some Christians advocate being happy, no matter what. We can be sad when bad things happen to us, but then what does Job do? He says

“...”Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I shall depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.””

(Job 1:21 NIV)

Job worships God. This is his first instinct; his automatic response. What a thing to do at this precise moment in his life. Everything has fallen apart around him, but he decides to worship God. There is no blame. We are so quick to blame. We live in a blame culture where whatever happens, if it is a bad thing, it has to be someone’s fault – someone is to blame, but never me! But Job does not blame God or Satan, although he sees the hand of God in it because he knows that God is sovereign.

And Satan is proved wrong: Job does not curse God, but worships God when everything goes. Would have be true of you or me? I would hope so and it can be if we build up our faith in God when things are going well.

RT Kendall, the minister who followed Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones at Westminster Chapel told of a time when he had a millionaire in his congregation. This millionaire did not just tithe, i.e. give 10% of his income, but he double tithed – he gave 20% of his income to the church he attended. Then the business he was in began to have problems because of an economic recession. The millionaire tried to hold on and hold on because the end of the recession was coming. However, just a couple of months before the end of the recession came and he would have come through it the banks foreclosed on his loans and overdrafts and he lost his business, he lost everything.

One person asked him if the money he had given to the church in the extra tithe would have saved him from bankruptcy. He answered that it would have done. Was he angry with God? Did he now doubt God? He answered an unequivocal ‘NO’ because he knew that he had treasure stored in heaven which was of far more importance than earthly wealth.

Job, a man of outstanding character, but then so can we and I cannot wait to see how that continues to unfold through the book of Job. Job is part of a great crowd of people of whom Peter writes

“These have come 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 Christ is revealed.” (1 Peter 1:7 NIV)

May this be our words as well.

PRAAYER