

Our Sovereign Lord and His Steadfast, Suffering Servant

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- [0 : 00] And we're going to be looking together with Phil Copeland at the book of Job. And I'm going to invite you now to turn in your Bibles as we read together in Job chapter 1 and 2. And then Phil is going to be teaching this to us and opening it up to us shortly.
- I'll leave Phil to introduce it and tell us all about it. I'm just going to read beginning at verse 1. There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job.
- And that man was blameless and upright. One who feared God and turned away from evil. There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. He possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys and very many servants.
- So that this man was the greatest of all the people of the East. His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each other on his day. And they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them.
- When the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them. And he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all.
- [1 : 10] For Job said, it may be that my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts. And thus Job did continually. Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord.
- And Satan also came among them. The Lord said to Satan, from where have you come? Satan answered the Lord and said, from going to and fro on the earth and from walking up and down on it.
- And the Lord said to Satan, have you considered my servant Job? That there's none like him on the earth. A blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil.
- Then Satan answered the Lord and said, does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has on every side?
- You've blessed the work of his hands and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has. And he'll curse you to your face.
- [2 : 19] The Lord said to Satan, behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand. So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.
- Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house. And there came a messenger to Job and said, the oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them.
- And the Sabaeans fell upon them and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword. And I alone have escaped to tell you. While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, the fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep of the servants and consumed them.

And I alone have escaped to tell you. And while he was yet speaking, there came another and said, the Chaldeans formed three groups and made a raid on the camels and took them and struck them servants with the edge of the sword.

And I alone have escaped to tell you. And while he was yet speaking, there came another and said, your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house.

[3 : 27] And behold, a great wind came across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house. And it fell upon the young people and their dead.

And I alone have escaped to tell you. Then Job arose, tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshipped.

And he said, naked I came from my mother's womb. And naked I shall return. The Lord gave. And the Lord has taken away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. And all this, Job did not sin or charge God with wrong. Again, there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord.

And Satan also came among them to present himself before the Lord. The Lord said to Satan, from where have you come? Satan answered the Lord and said, from going to and fro on the earth and from walking up and down on it.

[4 : 40] And the Lord said to Satan, have you considered my servant Job? That there is none like him on the earth. A blameless and righteous man who fears God and turns away from evil.

He still holds fast his integrity. Although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason. And Satan answered the Lord and said, skin for skin.

All that a man has he'll give for his life. But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh. And he'll curse you to your face.

And the Lord said to Satan, behold, he's in your hand. Only spare his life. So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.

And struck Job with loathsome sores. From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. And he took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes.

[5 : 44] And his wife said to him, do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die. But he said to her, you speak as one of the foolish women would speak.

Shall we receive good from God? And shall we not receive evil? In all this, Job did not sin with his lips.

Amen. May God bless to us his word. Well, good evening. And please do have the book of Job open in front of you.

That will be most helpful. I once heard of a Christian couple who were driving down the motorway. Folks who knew this couple said that they clearly feared the Lord and loved him.

For many years they had served him with great integrity. And they both recently retired. And as they were driving down the motorway, they were headed to visit their family, their children and their grandchildren for a celebration.

[6 : 54] And suddenly, the husband who was behind the wheel became ill. And within seconds, he was unconscious. And his wife who was sat beside him somehow managed to lean over and steer the car onto the hard shoulder.

Where the car skidded to a halt. Just in time for the wife to watch her husband take his final breath. On another occasion, I heard of a younger couple.

Both of them in their 30s, about the same age as my wife and I. They both loved the Lord. They weren't perfectly sinless, but they both lived upright lives for Christ.

They were both heavily involved in the life of the local church family. And one night, as usual, they went to bed together. They prayed, turned off the light, went to sleep.

And in the morning, only the husband woke up. His wife had died some hours earlier. Leaving him alone to raise their young children.

[7 : 59] Friends, the Bible is completely honest with us. It says that as believers, as those who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, there's not one of us who is guaranteed to have a life that is safe from suffering.

In fact, the Bible says that as believers, it is most likely that we will all face all kinds of suffering. All kinds of suffering in this life now.

There will be times when we will be utterly perplexed and full of pain because of what's going on in our lives. What is happening to us? And in fact, tonight, I know for a fact there are many people in the church family who will be watching this, who have already at some point in their lives been through far greater suffering than I have ever been through.

And of course, tonight, there will also be members of the church family who are watching this right now, who are currently in the midst of terrible suffering. They're in the thick of it as we speak.

Well, as believers, how do we respond to such times? Where do we turn? How are we supposed to feel? How are we supposed to pray and cry out to our Father in heaven when we're going through the mill?

[9 : 20] And what are we to think? Are we to automatically assume that God is disciplining us, punishing us, crushing us for something wrong that we've done?

Well, friends, the book of Job will help us immensely with all of these issues and more. It is a book about and for people who know suffering.

One author says this, Job is a fireball of a book. It is a staggeringly honest book. It is a book that knows what people actually say and think, not just what they say publicly in church.

It knows what people say behind closed doors and in whispers. And it knows what we say in our tears. It's not merely an academic book. If you listen to it carefully, it will touch us.

It will trouble us. It will unsettle us. And it will comfort us as well. At a very deep level. And God willing, over these next few Sunday nights, we will start to dip into this fireball book together.

[10 : 29] And then hopefully we will return to work through the next section a little later on in the year or in the coming months, God willing. Well, tonight we're going to spend most of our time looking at what is really the prologue to the book that Willie read for us earlier.

And as you'd expect, in the prologue to the book, there are many truths that you must understand. And you must grasp them in order to understand the rest of the book and its teaching and what comes ahead.

Well, how is this prologue structured? Well, to begin in chapter 1, verses 1 to 5, there's a short introduction where we are introduced to Job. And after that, we get four scenes.

Four scenes that alternate between action that happens up in the heavenly realms and action that happens down on earth. Heavenly realms and then on earth. And it's just worth noticing that we, the readers, get to see what is going on in the heavenly realms.

But the characters who are on earth have no idea what is going on in the heavenly realms. Keep that in mind, for we'll come back to that point later on in the weeks ahead.

[11 : 38] Well, let's look at the short introduction, verses 1 to 5 of chapter 1, where we meet Job. And right from the start, the author of this book wants us to be absolutely crystal clear that Job is a very godly man.

A very godly man. Verse 1, we're told that he was blameless. You see that there? Blameless. Now, that does not mean that he is sinless. Rather, it means he's genuine.

He's sincere. He's not pretending to be godly. He really is. It's the opposite of hypocrisy. Pretending to be one thing on the outside, but something else on the inside.

But with Job, what you see is what you get. He's also described as upright. That is, in his dealings with other people, Job is a man of great integrity.

All his relationships are marked with right dealing. And you will have noticed from the reading there that those descriptions of Job, they're repeated twice more throughout this prologue, both by the Lord himself.

[12 : 39] And most importantly, just look at verse 1 again. We're told that Job feared God and turned away from evil. So he is wise.

He honors God as God and gives thanks to him. And his life is marked by daily faith and repentance. I mean, if you could sum this up really simply by saying this.

Job is a true believer. A true believer. A very godly man. And more than that, he's also a great man.

Just looking at verses 2 to 4. We are told that he is not just a great man, but the greatest man in all of the East. Extremely prosperous and wealthy. He has 7,000 sheep, 3,000 cattle.

Not cattle, camels. Sorry. Forgot how to read there. Camels. 500 yoke of oxen. So that's basically 1,000 oxen in total. And 500 female donkeys.

[13 : 37] So therefore, we know from these details that he must have owned a massive amount of land for farming. And he would also have been involved in long-distance dealings and trade. For that's what you used camels for, to transport goods long distances.

If there was a rich man of the East list back then, then Job would have been firmly at the top. He was minted. He was very, very blessed.

He had masses of staff as well. More staff than on the Tron church team. He was massively well resourced. He also has seven children who seem exemplary.

The detail we're told there about them gathering for feasts on their day in verse 4. That is not a picture of incessant partying and gluttony.

But it probably refers to regular family gatherings. Perhaps for a birthday. To celebrate a birthday with the rest of the family. There's no hint of turmoil amongst his kids and his family.

[14 : 40] There's no fighting. There's just care and love and harmony. And in verse 5, I think we see that not only Job, but I think also his children care about being right before God.

For the morning after each of these family gatherings, Job, we're told, would summon his children. He would lead them and his children would come. And he would consecrate them before the Lord. He would offer a burnt offering as a sin offering for each of them.

Just in case any of them might have sinned in a particular way or cursed God in their hearts. In other words, Job and his children, I think, clearly believe that their sin needs to be atoned for by sacrifice.

They're not a self-righteous family. They're a humble family who seek the Lord's mercy. And so that's Job. Godly and great.

And if the book finished at chapter 1, verse 5, we would come away thinking this. Well, this is how the world must work. This is the way that God runs things.

[15 : 52] Godly people like Job, well, they must always prosper and reach the top. And they aren't godly? Well, they must decline and not reach the top. They must be down the bottom.

That's the good world we see here. Amen. Let's pray. But, of course, the book doesn't end there, does it? It continues. And let me say, by the end of the prologue, in chapter 2, verse 10, we are going to see that this godly and great man has been blasted by the most awful suffering, appalling suffering.

He loses everything. He loses everything. Not because he's been disciplined. Not because he's been punished. He's suffering for a different reason.

And we're going to find out what that reason is in a few moments when we look at the four scenes that are mentioned. But before then, we're going to stop. And we're going to have a bit of time of quiet now.

And I thought it would be helpful for us to reflect on the words of Psalm 91. Safe in the shadow of the Lord. And I bet these are the types of words that Job would have had in his heart as he went about his everyday life in verses 1 to 5.

[17 : 03] So let's be quiet now and listen to the musicians and follow the words and meditate and reflect upon them in our hearts. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Well, friends, apologies for the little technical hitch there with the words for the song there.

Perhaps you can look them up later in your own time or read the psalm. But there we go. Well, let's work with the rest of our time this evening through these four scenes in the prologue.

[19 : 44] And in these scenes, we're going to learn this. There is something far more important than our comfort and our happiness.

There is something far more important than our comfort and our happiness. And that is the glory of God. So the first scene starts in chapter 1 verse 6.

Chapter 1 verse 6. It's a new day. And we are in the heavenly realms. In the unseen reality where the sons of God have gathered together to present themselves before the Lord.

Who are these sons of God? Who are these sons of God? Who are these sons of God? Well, clearly, they are powerful spiritual beings. Some translations say that they are angels. And together, when they are gathered there, they form a sort of heavenly cabinet.

A divine council who are used by the king of the universe to run his universe. And it seems that this meeting happens daily. The Lord convenes his council.

[20 : 45] And each member gives a report to him before they are then sent out to carry out the Lord's will on his behalf. Very much like the U.S. president would call his senior staff to an early morning meeting in the opening.

Oval Office before sending them out for action. Only one member of the heavenly cabinet is mentioned individually. Verse 6.

Satan. Or literally translated, the Satan. Because it's a title. It means something like the accuser. The enemy. Now, it's sometimes assumed that because the Satan is evil, he can't be a member of the council.

And he must have barged his way in here uninvited. And when people think this is the case, they tend to read the Lord's question in verse 7 as a hostile question.

So they say, the Lord is saying in verse 7, Where have you come from, you gatecrasher? What on earth do you think you're doing here? But I think that's very unlikely.

[21 : 48] From what happens next in this chapter, I think it's abundantly clear that whilst the Satan is an opponent of the Lord, he is a submissive opponent. The Satan is an enemy, but he's not equal to God.

He's a creature who is 100% under the sovereign authority of the Lord. And so he can't possibly have barged in there uninvited. The context tells us that Satan is most likely a permanent member of the Lord's cabinet, who opposes the Lord, but carries out a purpose for the Lord nonetheless.

It is, as Luther said, Satan is God's Satan. And so in verse 7, the Lord calls the Satan to give his report. From where have you come?

It's report time. Tell me. And one commentator says that Satan replies in a pretty evasive manner. It's rather like a stropky teenager would reply to their parents when their parents have said, Where have you been?

And the teenager just says, Well, you know, stuff. Just stuff. That is, I've been going to and fro on the earth. Don't really have to tell you any more than that, do I?

[23 : 01] It reeks of disdain for the Lord. But in the next verse, I think it becomes apparent that the Satan has actually been out on assignment, carrying out a task that the Lord has sent him to do.

Just look at verse 8. And the Lord said to the Satan, Have you considered, have you set your heart on my servant Job?

There is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. I think that Satan's job is implied here.

As God's submissive opposition, his job is to roam the earth and search for men and women to see if anyone is genuinely godly.

His task is to hunt for real believers. And so I take it in verse 7, the Satan is actually implying that he's traveled all over the earth and he can't find anyone who is a genuine believer.

[24 : 03] And that is why in verse 8, the Lord responds by saying, Have you considered my servant Job? What about him? You must have seen that he is a genuine believer. And in verse 9, the Satan says, No, no.

Job worships you because you've blessed him with loads of good stuff. You've hedged him in with comfort all around him. Job does not love you for you.

If you stretch out your hand and take away all of the comfort and prosperity, well then we will see that his faith is a sham. And Job will curse you to your face.

Of course, this could massively backfire for the Satan, couldn't it? Because if the Lord removes Job's comfort and prosperity, and if Job worships the Lord simply because the Lord is the Lord who is worthy of all worship, then it would show that Job really is a true believer.

And it would silence Satan's accusations. And God would be glorified. Listen to Christopher Ashe in these verses. He says this, The Satan is not bullying God, nor is he offering him a casual wager, as though Job's sufferings were to see who wins a bet in heaven.

[25 : 23] No. No. The Satan, for all his malice, is doing something necessary to the glory of God. In some deep way, it is necessary for it to be publicly seen by the whole universe that God is worthy of the worship of man, and that God's worth is in no way dependent on God's gifts.

And Ash then says, exactly the same logic presents itself when Peter writes to the Christian church in the New Testament in 1 Peter 1. Peter says this to the suffering church, You have been grieved by various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

In other words, when Jesus returns, the fact that a Christian has gone on trusting and believing, even though all of the blessings that he had has been removed, and he has suffered severe trials, in the end, that will prove to the universe that another human being considers God to be worthy of worship simply because he's God.

God will be praised, his glory adored, and his honor seen by the universe because Christian men and women have gone on worshiping no matter what happens to them.

The glory of God is more important than your or my or Job's comfort. And so in verse 12, the Lord gives this terrible instruction and permission.

[27 : 08] And let's not skip over this because it might be familiar to us. I'm sure it is familiar to us, but let's not skip over it or skim over it. It is a terrible and shocking instruction and permission.

The Lord sovereignly allows Satan to carry out his evil scheme upon his friend Job. He says, Behold, all that he has in your hand is in your hand.

Only against him do not stretch out your hand. And so Satan leaves the presence of the Lord. And boom, we're into the next scene in verse 13.

And we see Job, immediately he receives these four pieces in quick succession of just devastating news from four servants who come to him in rapid succession, one after the other.

Messenger one bursts in and says, Job, robbers have stolen your oxen and your donkeys. They've killed all the servants who were there too. Only I've escaped to tell you. And before he's even finished, messenger two comes in and says, Job, all your sheep are dead.

[28 : 12] Lightning, which is what it means from talking about the fire of God, has come down and struck them and annihilated them and all of the servants who were with them. Only I've escaped to tell you. And before he's finished, messenger three comes in and says, Job, robbers stole all of your camels, every last one, and they killed all of your servants.

Only I've escaped. And immediately, whilst he's still finishing off, messenger four comes in and says, Job, your children were feasting in the house of your eldest son at one of the family gatherings.

A terrible storm has come and shook the foundations of the house. It collapsed and everyone who was inside is dead. Job, your precious children are all dead.

In an instant, Job is stripped of everything, his possessions and his children. And yet look at his response. Look at verse 20.

At this, Job got up and tore his robe, probably to mimic what was going on in his heart. And he shaved his head, which is what people did back then to associate themselves with the dead.

[29 : 30] So he grieves, he mourns, of course he does. He falls down to the ground and curses God. No. In worship.

And he says, 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. In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

Job proves to be a real believer. He blesses God. He acknowledges that he is the giver of all good things. And he's the one who has the right to take them away.

He's not bitter against God here. He blesses God. It is a great conclusion to a terrible story. But again, it's not the conclusion to the story, is it?

In chapter 2, verse 1, we're in the next scene and it's another day. And again, we're back in the heavenly throne room. We're back in the heavenly throne room where the Lord has convened his cabinet once again.

[30 : 39] And again, Satan and the Lord converse. In verse 3, the Lord says, have you considered my servant Job? Do you see his steadfast trust in me?

Even though you incited me to destroy him without reason, he still trusts in me. But Satan doesn't admit defeat. Instead, what he says is, Lord, or he says to the Lord, he doesn't call him Lord, does he?

But he says to the Lord, you've not pushed him hard enough. Verse 4, you've taken away all his possessions, but what about his health and his life?

Reach out your hand and hit his health. Afflict him with deep physical sickness. Then he will curse you to your face. And then the world will see that he is not a real believer.

And again, the shock of the passage is that the Lord doesn't stop and say to the Satan, nonsense, Job has faced enough suffering. No, again, the Lord gives the Satan a terrible instruction and permission.

[31 : 45] Verse 6, behold, he is in your hand. Only spare his life. And boom, immediately, we're straight into scene 4 in verse 7.

And Satan immediately leaves the presence of the Lord and he heaps more suffering upon the Lord's friend. And Job is covered, we're told, from head to toe in loathsome sores.

When I was, maybe about 5 years ago, a bit younger, I actually had the shingles. I had a very mild dose of the shingles, a really bad skin irritant.

I had a really horrible rash. And I tell you, my life for about 2 weeks was 24-7 of trying to not scratch my sores. Because if I scratched my sores, I would get a relief, a relief.

But it would just open up the sores even more and cause more pain and prolong my suffering. Job is struck down with a skin condition far worse than mild shingles.

[32 : 48] And his only comfort, the only thing that brings him any relief in life, is to scrape his sores with a bit of broken pottery. But of course, that surely would have just opened up the wounds even deeper and prolonged his suffering.

It is a dismal picture. At the end of verse 8, Job, who was once the greatest man of the East, now sits on the ash heap. That is the heap where people would burn up their garbage.

Probably outside of the city, isolated on his own. He has become like the living dead. And in verse 9, Job's wife comes to him and you think, well, a bit of comfort is going to come his way.

But no. And it's easy to go really hard on Job's wife. And people differ on what to do with Job's wife and what she says.

Easy to go hard on her, but she's seen her husband suffer so much but what she says is clearly not helpful at all. She looks at him and she says, why are you still holding on to your integrity?

[34 : 02] Why are you still trusting in God? Why are you still walking by faith? It obviously isn't doing you any good. For goodness sake, why don't you just curse God and he will strike you down and your suffering will be over.

And in verse 10, Job, he doesn't go so far as to call his wife a fool, but he pretty much does. He says to her, oh, you're talking like a foolish woman.

What you say is not worthy of you. Shall we receive good from God and shall we not receive evil? Again, after his trials, Job's heart is full of God the creator who is the author of good gifts.

All the good he has received, he has received from God. Can he not trust the same God to give him harmful things and to believe that God knows best? The sense here of when it says receive really means to accept and to humbly bow beneath God's loving providence even when it's painful providence.

In other words, Job continues to show himself to be a real believer. And that is what's concluded at the end of verse 10. In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.

[35 : 29] And again, at this point in the narrative, I take it we, the readers, are supposed to breathe a sigh of relief and think, oh, great. His suffering and the oppression of Satan is over.

But not so because in the next section we're told three of Job's friends arrive. Come back in the weeks ahead and you'll find out more about the fact that through them Satan will actually continue his assault on God's servant Job.

Job. Well, friends, let me sum up this and tie this all together for us today. Friends, here is a man who is a model example for us today as the people of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that is what James 5 says to us so clearly. Go home and read that later on tonight. You will see that Job is held up as a prophet of the Lord who models for us how we are to persevere through suffering for the glory of God.

He's a prophet who, yes, we're told elsewhere in the Bible foreshadows the pattern of suffering that the Lord Jesus would face centuries later. But he's also a model for all those who are in union with Christ and the Lord Jesus.

[36 : 51] And as I said at the beginning, the Bible tells us that as the people of God today there will be times in our lives when Satan will seek to sift us like wheat.

Times when our faith will be tested. Times when we will well be hit with suffering. Might not be to the same extent as Job but still suffering nonetheless.

And friends, when that happens it's not always because we've been punished for something. It's not because always because the Lord has disciplining us. But more often than not it is because God wants to show the principalities and the powers and authorities in the heavenly realms that we really are his servants.

His people whom he has redeemed by grace. His people who genuinely love him. Not for all of the blessings that he gives us but we love him because he is our God who is absolutely worthy of our love and worship.

God wants to and so as we close tonight let's remember this deeply challenging and it is deeply challenging. I've been thinking about it all week. It's so challenging but it's an absolutely necessary message that we need to remember and live by.

[38 : 10] The glory of God is more important than your and my comfort. and if by the help of the spirit of Christ in us we follow Job's steadfast example it will ultimately bring glory and praise to our God on the day when Jesus returns.

Well let's be quiet for a moment bow our heads take some time to respond to the Lord's word in our own hearts and then I'll lead us in prayer. Amen. Amen. Well Heavenly Father we praise you that you are our merciful and gracious Heavenly Father.

You've reached out in your grace to us and brought us to life in your Son saving us out of the dominion of the evil one forever. And Father we thank you that your word is honest with us and it tells us that there may be times in our lives when we will go through painful and perplexing days of suffering and turmoil days when we're in deep distress.

Father we pray that you will give us the strength that we need in such times to follow the example of your servant Job to love and worship you with our lives not because of the good blessings that you give us but because you alone are God and you alone are worthy to receive our love and our worship.

Father we pray that as we come to the book of Job in the weeks ahead may we have humble hearts that are ready to learn and hungry to see as Job wrestles with his friends and with you.

[40 : 11] Help us to come with humble hearts that want to learn more and more that you are the God of great grace and we pray this in Jesus name and for his sake.

Amen.