

## **MAY THE NAME OF THE LORD BE PRAISED!**

Christmas is one of those times when most of us find ourselves a little dissatisfied. I don't mean unhappy with the gifts that we'll get or even those that we buy, just *hoping* that the people we buy for like them. And I don't mean the unsettling amount of money we may put on a credit card just to have the kind of Christmas we want. Many of us are dissatisfied because of the *pace* of Christmas, the speed with which the day arrives. For many, it can't come soon enough! If you're looking forward to a holiday get-together, maybe an annual dinner or event, there is great anticipation. Lots of kids cannot *possibly* wait until Christmas Day to dump out full stockings and to open presents! Some look forward to hearing the children of our church family tell us the Christmas story in their service on Christmas Eve or really look forward to Christmas Day worship. Some of you serve in many ways here at church and there is a certain relief when things slow down a bit after that Christmas morning service—*that* is something to look forward to also!

Let me ask you this: how do you feel and how do you behave during this time that can test our patience? Kids, do you bug your parents to open presents early? Do you ask every day "*How many days until Christmas?*" If you're super busy, do you get frustrated and complain? Are you stressed out? Are you short-tempered? Are you just tired of it all and wish the Lord would return already so you don't have to deal with it?! In other words, does your impatience show?

And let me ask you this also: Do all the things going on—even if they are mostly good things (or at least not bad things)—draw your focus away from what God did on that first Christmas in Bethlehem? In your stress and impatience, do you sometimes totally forget about God altogether?

This morning our worship has patience and reliance upon God as its theme. There is perhaps no better lesson on this than the one we see in the example of Job. We heard about his life in our first lesson for this morning. Let's review that account and then consider how we might learn from Job's reactions to stressful and patience-testing situations.

---

If you're like me, you find it odd to hear that the angels were assembled before God and Satan seems to have snuck into the group. There's not much we can say about that other than that God allowed the fallen angel, Satan, to be part of this audience before him. This historical account of Job reveals that the Lord does allow Satan some freedom to roam, but there are limits established by God also. Satan is more like a dog on a leash, with limitations on how far he can go and what he can do. Satan answered God that he had been roaming the earth, to which the Lord responded, "*Have you considered my servant Job?*" Then he praised Job as a righteous man.

Satan dared to argue with God that Job only loved him because God had been so good to him. If you were to read the first verses of Job chapter 1, you would discover that Job was the wealthiest man of his time. *Easy for a rich guy with a big, loving family to be happy with God*, Satan responded. *You've spoiled him! I swear that he'll curse you to your face if you take away the good things you have given him!*

The Lord then allowed Satan to take things into his own hands where Job was concerned. You heard what happened. From out of nowhere, a rapid succession of disasters hit Job's family and his earthly possessions. An Arab band swept in killing his servants and stealing his donkeys and oxen. One person escaped to tell him the bad news. Bad news upon bad news came as another messenger arrived and reported that fire from the sky had wiped out the sheep and the servants tending to them. Before he finished his report, another came to tell Job about the extremely valuable camels. Chaldean raiders came and stole them, killing the servants who cared for them. Before all of this could even settle in, one more messenger arrived with the worst news that could have come. His loving family, who often enjoyed large feasts and events together, were killed at just such a gathering. What sounds like a tornado flattened the house and none of them survived.

I would be surprised if any of us have experienced anything close to what Job endured. Yes, we have received devastating news: we've lost our job, we've been victims of disease or trauma, loved ones have died, we've filed for bankruptcy...life is full of things that cause us deep pain. Sometimes we may feel that Satan is behind it. Sometimes we realize that this is the way life will be in a world where everything and everyone is tainted with sin. And sometimes, let's be honest, we bring it on ourselves because we are irresponsible, careless, or just plain sinful in our behavior.

If any of those terrible things or something else happens to us, how do we often react? I want you to think about your first reaction to such things, since you know yourself very well. Are you angry at the world...or at God? Does God even enter your mind? Are you prone to excessive handwringing—*"What am I going to do?!"* Are you despondent, depressed? Do you sit and wallow in it all and ask *"Why?"* Do you even, in your mind, suggest that you don't deserve this, that you're a decent person, a Christian even, and this should not happen to you? Do worry and anxiety consume you? Are you impatient with God and his answers to your prayers—or his seeming disinterest in your situation? Do you dare get demanding with God, wanting answers or resolution or some sign that he is still there...or still cares?

There are a hundred and one ways we go wrong in difficult times and show the sinful side of us that is unacceptable to a loving God who acts in divine wisdom and allows things to happen for the good of others and us. That sin is unacceptable to an all-powerful God who owes no explanation for doing what he knows to be right and best. When we respond in these ways, we are no better than Satan himself who arrogantly spoke against God. Satan means “accuser” and that is really what we are when we grieve like people who have no faith...and exhibit no trust in the God of grace...and act as if we have no knowledge of his promises to us. When we sin in difficult times, we act as if God did not send his own Son into the world to be the Savior because we don’t consider that if he was willing to send Jesus to the cross to pay for our sins, he will certainly care for us in all circumstances. We even sin when we want to soften it and say of our wrong reactions, *“Well, it’s understandable considering what I have gone through.”* No, it’s not understandable; it is sin before God because it shows a lack of faith and trust in him above all things, which is what he expects from his dearly loved children.

If you want to know the appropriate response in time of tragedy and suffering, look no farther than Job. After this wealthiest of men lost everything including his large, dear family, this is what happened: **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 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.**

In his time of suffering and loss, Job grieved—that’s the tearing of his robe and shaving of his head—but he immediately worshiped the Lord! At a time when he had the choice of acting like sinner or saint, Job’s faith shined. How hard it is for us to trust the love of God and his promises in difficult times! The example of Job is what we need to see; this is how you and I rightly respond. When all was lost, Job’s response was **“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.”**

Wow. Let that response to ultimate devastation and suffering sink in for a minute. **“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.”** The accident that damages your new car, the girlfriend that dumped you, the ketchup stain that ruins your new dress, the flu that keeps you from attending that game or concert you’d been planning on for months—those things don’t really even register by comparison, do they? When you consider how we react to much lesser things in our lives, it’s embarrassing. It’s shameful, really. Job was a real child of God, just like you and me. This isn’t some fantastical story. This was a real guy with real problems and real faith who, in the face of life’s trouble and trauma, placed his trust in the Lord.

Consider this also: Job experienced God's love and care for him and only the *promise* of a Savior. You and I sit here today knowing the reality of that promise fulfilled. Job staked his hope in God's love on a promise whose fulfillment was off in the future and he patiently trusted his God even in the face of difficulty and suffering. You and I are blessed to know that God did send his Son into the world on a Bethlehem night. The Savior who was at the heart of God's love came into the world as promised, and he paid for all people's sin. Christmas is what Job longed to see. Christmas is why he had the faith he did even through the most traumatic times.

Like Job, we don't always know why things happen in our lives and in the world around us. And we have options like he had options. We can be angry and cry "*Unfair!*" We can walk away from God. Or we can humbly acknowledge that all our blessings came from him in the first place. He has given and he can rightfully take away. And finally, remember that we are talking about material things and life in this world.

Job knew that God had bigger and better things in store for him. Many of you know that Job was the one who, after God later allowed Satan to affect his health and after his close friends turned on him, said this: **I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me! (Job 19:25-27)**

We sometimes talk about a person having "the patience of Job." He wasn't perfect; he was a sinner like us who needed the Savior he trusted would one day come. But he did display a faith-filled patience and trust in the Lord as life swirled around him. He put his hope in his Savior-God, knowing that he had a Redeemer who would take him from this sin-filled world to his home in heaven.

My friends in Christ, our Lord wants us to have that same heavenly perspective. Understand that God is in control at all times. He loves us through all things and there will come a day when everything will be made right. The Savior Job longed to see will come again, not as a baby in a manger, but as our Rescuer who will take us to heaven. As you experience the ups and downs of life, do not stress yourself out, give in to anger, become impatient, challenge God's wisdom or charge him with wrongdoing. Instead, keep in mind the example of our brother in faith, Job, and with great trust, say along with him at all times, **MAY THE NAME OF THE LORD BE PRAISED!** Amen.