

## **No Matter What By David Feddes**

*“Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?” Job 2:10*

He was the greatest man in his part of the world. He was the greatest in success and achievement, with a thriving family, many people working for him, and enormous wealth. He was also the greatest in personal character: devoted to God, opposed to evil, a shining example of integrity, a true family man who faithfully prayed for his children and their relationship to God. God was so pleased with him that the Lord singled him out and bragged about him to a gathering of angels.

Among the angels at that gathering was the chief of the fallen angels, Satan. The Lord said to Satan, “Have you seen my servant Job? That man is something special! He reveres God and rejects evil.” Satan was not impressed. Satan’s very name means accuser, and true to form the accuser fired back, “Does Job fear God for nothing? The only reason Job sticks with you,” Satan sneered, “is that you pay him off. Haven’t you set up a hedge to shield him and that big, happy family of his from trouble? Haven’t you made the man so rich that he owns everything in sight? Job doesn’t love you. He just loves the paychecks you keep giving him. Take it all away, and Job will spit in your face.” Satan accuses Job of having a health-and-wealth religion, a prosperity gospel where Job is interested in God only because the Lord is able to give him lots of stuff.

What if God and Satan were talking not about Job but about you? Would God single you out as someone who shuns evil and serves the Lord and brings him pleasure? Or do you pay little attention to God and prefer that God pay little attention to you and just let you do your own thing?

Let’s suppose you’re religious and fairly well behaved. Do you truly love God? Or do you try to please God only as long as it pays? Do you serve God for free or for a fee? Some religious people constantly emphasize God expanding their borders and blessing them and putting a hedge of protection around them. But the only one in the Bible to mention a hedge of protection is Satan. If your brand of religion focuses entirely on God-given prosperity and protection, you have the kind of religion Satan sneered at. In that kind of religion, God has no true friends. God is like a billionaire whom people try to please not because they love him but because they want some of his wealth. So let me ask you again: what if Satan and God were talking about you? If Satan said you would curse God if he took blessings away from you, would the accuser be right? Or would you love the Lord and stay loyal to him no matter what?

### **Worship Amid Grief**

Satan is a cynic. He thinks there’s no such thing as genuine love. Satan refuses to believe that any human would love God and be loyal to the Lord simply for who God is. Satan figures God would have to bribe people to get them on his side. But God is not a cynic. God knows that love is real, because God is love. And God knows that some people really do love him.

Job was one of those people who loved God and was loved by God, and God counted on Job to love him no matter what. When Satan made his accusation that Job would curse God if the Lord stopped prospering and protecting him, God replied, “Give it your best shot, Satan. Do what you want with everything I’ve given to Job—but don’t you dare touch Job himself.”

In one horrible day Job lost everything. His workers were massacred by bands of killers, who then made off with Job’s livestock. A terrible lightning storm wiped out some more. Job’s

property and employees were gone, and that still wasn't the worst of it. That same day, while all of Job's sons and daughters were sharing a meal at the oldest brother's house, a terrible wind destroyed the house and wiped out all of Job's children.

How did Job respond to these horrors? He was shocked and devastated. He mourned his terrible losses. But he also worshiped God and said, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised." Job was in terrible grief, but at the same time he knew he hadn't lost anything that God hadn't given him in the first place.

Job realized that even grief points to God's goodness. Much of the grief we feel wouldn't be possible if God hadn't been so good to us. Why does it hurt so much when a loved one dies? Because that person was so dear and meant so much to you. And who gave you that dear person? God did. God hasn't taken away anybody or anything that he didn't first give you to enjoy for a time. We enter this world with nothing; we leave it with nothing; in between birth and death, everything we have is from God. The size of our grief shows the size of the gift. The greater the gift God gives, the greater the grief if he takes it away. So even as we mourn what we have lost, let's give thanks for what we could enjoy for a time. What we had was a gift, not something we earned. God gave it; we didn't earn it.

Gerald Sittser, a Christian college professor, lost his wife, his daughter, and his mother in an awful accident. He later wrote, "I did not deserve to lose three members of my family. But then again, I am not sure I deserved to have them in the first place... Perhaps I did not deserve their deaths; but I did not deserve their presence in my life either."

When we see God's blessings as undeserved gifts, we know that we have no right to curse God if he withholds something we want or takes away someone we love. The grief is real and terrible, but it is not a sound reason to reject God. All grief at what God has taken away is at the same time a reminder of how much God gave. Job honored the Lord's right to take as well as to give. He did not sin by slandering God.

### **For Better, For Worse**

Did that finally convince Satan of Job's faithfulness to God? Not at all. God said, "Satan, have you seen Job lately? He is still loyal to me even though he lost everything for no apparent reason." But the cynic from hell retorted, "The man is even worse than I thought! He is totally self-centered. What does he care if his workers and children are dead, as long as he can save his own skin? A man will give up anybody and anything as long as he can keep his own health. He'll do whatever you want as long as you keep him alive and healthy, but give him a few jolts of raw, physical pain, and he will curse you to your face."

God said, "Okay, he's in your hands, Satan. You may hurt him, but you can't kill him. You must spare his life." So Satan tormented Job with horrible sores that covered his body from head to toe. Job found himself sitting on a garbage heap like a bum, scraping his festering sores with a fragment from a broken dish.

This was too much for Job's wife. Mrs. Job exploded: "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Give it up! Curse God and die!" That didn't sound like the dear wife Job had come to know. Job replied, "You're not thinking straight. You're talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?" Job refused his wife's devilish advice. Instead he urged her to be loyal to God, for better or for worse. For a moment Mrs. Job was temporarily carried away by bitterness and Satan's schemes, and Satan tried to use her to destroy Job's faith. But instead God used Job to restore his wife's faith. Job reminded his wife that in good times and in bad times, God is still God, worthy of our worship and love. Whatever God sends our way or

allows Satan to inflict on us, no matter how puzzling or painful, we must stay true to God and accept that he knows what he's doing.

Job's question to his wife is a basic test of whether our faith is real: "Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?" If your belief in God depends on everything always going right and on everything always being fair, then—I hate to say it, but—you might as well forget about God. We live in a world full of pain; everything doesn't always go right. We live in a world full of injustice; life isn't always fair. You may be sheltered for a while, but you'll feel pain and injustice at some point.

Some of us believe in God for as long as our lives go the way we want, and when things don't go our way, we turn against God. We have no problem believing in God as long as we're secure and it's other people who suffer pain and injustice. But if something terrible suddenly happens to us personally, we suddenly find that we can't trust God. We may even come to hate him.

When something bad happens to us, our first question tends to be, "Why me?" But somewhere along the line, we also need to ask, "Why not me?" What makes me think I should have a free pass through life and be exempt from the hurts that afflict others? And what makes me think that the Lord who gives me every good thing has no right to take anything away from me?

We need to understand the situation in which we find ourselves. Ever since Adam and Eve, all people have fallen under the influence of sin and under the power of suffering and death. We are all vulnerable to suffering because we are all part of the fallen human race, and we live in a broken world. God still sends many good things and loving relationships into our lives, but these are his gift, not our right. He sends good things, but he does not exempt us from the pain of a hurting world.

Another fact about our situation is that if we love God and follow the Lord Jesus, it doesn't make suffering less likely but more likely. When we belong to God and are faithful to him, as Job was, Satan will be all the more eager to attack us. God gives us the enormous honor of standing against Satan and defeating him. When God loves you, he doesn't just give you a pleasant, easy life. Those God loves, he enlists in his armies to battle against Satan. And battle is seldom easy or fun. It can involve terrible pain and loss. Jesus said that to be his disciple, you must take up your cross and follow him.

In light of the fact that all of us live in a sinful, broken world, and in light of the fact that true followers of the Lord are enlisted in the battle against Satan, we must expect trouble, not be shocked by it. It may be okay to ask, "Why me?" (and we'll see in a later program that Job did a lot of questioning), but as we ask, "Why me?" let's not forget to ask, "Why not me?" And let's not abandon God the moment trouble comes our way.

If you believe in God so long as others in the world suffer pain but you're okay, it shows that your real concern isn't with fairness but with yourself. And if you give up on God because of something unpleasant, it simply means you never loved God in the first place. You loved what he was doing for you, you loved the gifts he was giving you, but you didn't love *him*. Your loyalty was based only on how well God was paying you.

That's what Satan accused Job of doing—sticking with God only because it made him prosperous and healthy. But Job turned out to be more devoted to God than Satan thought. Even when Job lost his wealth, his workers, his family, and his health, he didn't curse God. Job's question, "Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?" really means, "Shall we accept God?" Shall we accept him no matter what, even if it doesn't seem to pay off in other things we

care about? Do we prize God more than we prize the things God gives or takes away? Do we entrust ourselves to God and his grace, or would we rather insist on always getting exactly what we deserve?

True faith is not the belief that tomorrow will be pleasant if only I expect it to be pleasant. True faith says, “Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?” True faith says, “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.” True faith prizes God above every other blessing and keeps trusting God no matter what.

### **Sovereign Over Satan**

One of the hardest things to grasp in the Bible book of Job is the connection between God’s actions and Satan’s. It’s clear that Satan was the direct cause of the terrible things that happened to Job. It’s equally clear that Satan could not have done any of these things if God had prevented him. Pain and evil are Satan’s work, not God’s—and yet everything Satan does is allowed to happen by God and is somehow part of the Lord’s plan.

Later in the story, Job questions why the Lord sent such horrors into his life. Wouldn’t it be easy for God to say that Satan is responsible? But God never says, “It’s not my fault—it’s all Satan’s doing.” God never says, “I have absolutely nothing to do with the killers who murdered your workers and stole your property—Satan is to blame.” God never says, “I have no connection with the wind that blew over the house and killed all your sons and daughters—Satan did it while I wasn’t looking.” The book of Job says that Satan could only go as far as God allowed him to go.

Some religious people talk as though God has nothing to do with pain and death. They speak as though Satan is totally free to do whatever he wants. If something bad happens to us, we shouldn’t wonder about God’s purpose in it, because God had nothing to do with it. God wants only health and happiness for us, they say, so if we experience sickness and sorrow, we shouldn’t even think about where our troubles fit in God’s plan. This approach may be an attempt not to be angry at God when trouble strikes—but what if God would rather have us get angry than pretend he can’t limit Satan or direct all things according to his divine plan? The book of Job leaves no doubt that God is ultimately in charge of all things. God is somehow related to everything that happens. Job knew this very well. When Job himself had questions, he brought them to God, because Job knew that God is the ultimate ruler of all things.

If you read all the way to the end of the book of Job, you find that God never does tell Job about Satan’s role. The book of Job tells *us* about Satan’s role in these things, but God never tells *Job* what Satan did. One reason God didn’t mention Satan is that ultimately God took responsibility for Job and for everything that happened to him. Although God didn’t force Satan to be bad, and although God didn’t put theft and murder into the hearts of the killers, God did allow these things to happen. God makes no attempt to hide that fact. God is not ashamed to be the director and ruler of all things. He calls us to adore his majesty and power and to trust his goodness, no matter what.

### **God’s Goal**

That brings us to a second reason God didn’t tell Job about Satan’s role: maybe God’s ultimate goal wasn’t just to prove Satan wrong but to draw Job even closer to himself. Satan got showed up and defeated in the process, of course, but God wasn’t just using Job to beat Satan. God was using Satan to help Job.

Even before troubles hit Job, God was pleased with Job and loved him. But Job still didn’t

know God as well as he would later know the Lord. Job knew God from a distance, as a source of blessing, but he didn't yet know God up close. Even if you know God to a degree and have a real relationship with him, you seldom know him as well before you suffer as after you suffer.

Job was a godly man who handled prosperity in a godly way. Back in the days when God made sure everything went well for Job, he used his health and wealth to help others. He prayed to God faithfully. Meanwhile, his family and health were superb. What could be better than doing well for himself and doing good to others? To Job it felt like a warm, safe nest. He thought he'd stay in that cozy nest the rest of his life—and he assumed it would be a very long, healthy, happy life (Job 29:18). He'd go on being comfortable and comforting others and always being strong and lively, till he would at last die peacefully at a ripe old age. As it turns out, Job did live to be very old and died at peace with God, but went through a time where he faced a lot more trouble than he ever expected.

If you love God and others as Job did, you may thank the Lord each day for his gifts and use those gifts to help others. But then disaster strikes. This time it doesn't strike someone else; it strikes you. Suddenly your comfort and strength are gone. Your plans crumble. Your warm, safe nest is only a distant memory. You find yourself falling through the air with nothing to help you or hold you.

Sometimes a young eagle must be driven from the nest before it will fly. The same can be true of us. Sometimes we're forced to fly by faith. The Bible says, "Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles" (Isaiah 40:31). How often do we really spread the wings of faith when we're sitting in our safe, warm nest? Sometimes God allows Satan to attack us so that we learn to fly. That's not what Satan intends, of course—he only intends to destroy our faith—but God turns Satan's attacks for our good.

Near the end of the book of Job, Job said to God, "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you" (Job 42:5). Job came to know God through direct encounter. That made everything worthwhile. Job got no explanation for his troubles. Instead, he got something better: God himself. Job was humbled but satisfied. And Satan was out of the picture. Satan had wanted to destroy Job's integrity. But God's intent all along was to take Job beyond moral integrity to personal encounter. Satan was shamed and silenced in the process, but God's main goal was not just to deal with Satan but help Job know the Lord better than ever.

After Job's misery accomplished its purpose, God stopped the pain and replaced it with bounty. Job's wealth was doubled. Even his family was doubled: Job's ten children in heaven were matched by another ten on earth. This shows that although God may let us endure hardship at times, the Lord does love to bless his people. The God who sometimes takes away is also the God who gives and gives and keeps on giving. In the end he will wipe every tear away and give eternal, unbroken happiness to all who love him. In the meantime we must trust him no matter what.

Trust doesn't mean we never ask questions or complain. Job is famous for his perseverance and patience, but the Bible also says a lot about the impatience of Job and his complaints to God. That's a topic for another time, but for now let's allow Job's question to search our hearts: "Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?" Let's defeat Satan and bring joy to the Lord by serving God no matter what. Let's seek God until he reveals more of himself to us. And if we must ask the question, "Why me?" let's not just ask that question concerning our problems. Let's ask why God has chosen us to receive his special favor in Christ.

If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, in his miraculous birth, his horrible death, and his glorious resurrection, then by all means, go ahead and ask, "Why me?" The Son of God took on

my human nature—why me? Jesus became a brother to me—why me? Jesus loves me—why me? Jesus died and suffered hell for me—why me? Jesus walks beside me and lives inside me through his Holy Spirit—why me? Jesus gives me everlasting life—why me? Jesus makes me a child of God, a ruler of angels—why me?

For the time being, we still need to face Job's question, "Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" But it's a temporary question. For the time being, we live in a world that is still broken, a world that includes both good and trouble. But in the world to come, where God will be all in all, there will be only good. For God is good. When God is all in all, I will spend all eternity enjoying God and reigning with him, and my grateful, awestruck question will forever be, "Why me?"