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WAS SATAN TRIUMPHANT? WAS GOD SATISFIED WITH JOB?

In this message, we will reflect on the following three issues pertaining to the ordeal of Job:

- Was Satan triumphant in his challenge to God concerning Job?
- Was God satisfied with how Job went through the testing and with the outcome?
- What is the meaning of the episode? Why did God allow Job to go through so much pain and suffering and why did He allow Satan to afflict him so severely?

1. Was Satan triumphant in his challenge to God concerning Job?

We have seen that Job faltered during the trials and was rebuked by God. But does this mean that Satan had triumphed in his challenge to God concerning Job? To put it in another way, did Job fail the test that God allowed him to go through in relation to Satan's challenge? To answer this question, we need to look more closely at the substance of Satan's challenge.

Satan's challenge and attack

Job 1:8-11

8 The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil."

9 Then Satan answered the Lord, "Does Job fear God for nothing?"

10 "Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.

11 "But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face."

In these verses, Satan was challenging God's pronouncement on Job. He was not prepared to accept God's statement about Job's character. He insinuated that there was no true uprightness or true fear of God in Job. As he put it, "Does Job fear God for nothing?"

The word "fear" can be translated as "reverence". Satan was implying that Job appeared to have reverence for God and to be upright because God blessed him materially and had made a hedge about him and all that he had (v. 10). The meaning

is that God was protecting Job and what he had. If God were to remove the protection on Job, including the material blessings and the comforts of life, Job would curse Him (v. 11). Thus, he charged that Job neither had true fear of God nor true uprightness and that he appeared to be so only because of various advantages and material benefits.

This is a very significant issue for us to reflect upon. Many seek to honour and obey God believing that He will bless them materially. As long as they receive such blessings, they will be pleased with God and will worship and rejoice in Him. But if the material blessings were withheld and they were to suffer deprivation, they will begin to walk according to their own desires and the ways of the world.

Job was severely tested in this area. We see in Job 1:12 that God permitted Satan power over what Job had.

Job 1:12

Then the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him."

God allowed Satan to afflict Job in what he had, but not on Job himself. Satan began to distress Job with a series of calamities that were clearly not coincidences or mere natural disasters. As a result, Job's possessions were plundered or destroyed and his servants and children killed. The hedge about Job was removed and Satan systematically and thoroughly stripped him of the outward material blessings and comforts of life.

Job's response and God's verdict

What was Job's response when these disasters occurred?

Job 1:20-22

20 Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped.

21 He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb,
And naked I shall return there.

The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord."

22 Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.

Although Job was deprived of his physical possessions, his servants, and most tragic of all, his children, he continued to worship God. He recognised that all that he had came from God. If the Lord should be pleased to take them away (though we know in this instance it was not God who took them away but Satan who had done so, with God's permission), he would continue to bless the name of the Lord. Under the terrible circumstances, Job responded admirably. He did have true reverence for God. He passed the test and proved Satan wrong.

We look at God's verdict on what had happened.

Job 2:3

The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause."

Job held fast to his integrity. He continued to be a blameless and upright man despite the extreme difficulties he faced. With that, Satan was greatly displeased, and he mounted another challenge.

Further attacks by Satan

In Job 2:4-5, we read that Satan disputed God's verdict on Job. He claimed that if God were to afflict Job in his body, he would curse Him.

Job 2:4-5

4 Satan answered the Lord and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life.

5 "However, put forth Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse You to Your face."

This is another relevant area for us to reflect upon. When we are severely afflicted in our being, will we continue to worship and love God, and truly rejoice in Him? Some people may appear to go through adversities well or even to speak positively but within their hearts, there could be bitterness, murmuring and no true rejoicing in God. Is this true of us?

In Job 2:6, the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life." In other words, God permitted Satan to afflict Job personally and in his body, but not to kill him. We see here a manifestation of God's sovereignty. God drew a limit to what Satan could do to Job.

Satan then began to cruelly afflict Job's entire body with sore boils (v. 7). Job sat among the ashes and took a potsherd to scrape himself because of the physical affliction (v. 8). The pain that Job suffered was very great (v. 13).

Job remained steadfast

When Job's wife noticed that Job was still holding fast to his integrity, she said to him, "Curse God and die!" (v. 9). But Job responded in a truly remarkable way:

Job 2:10

But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Job was prepared to continue walking with God and worshipping Him even though he suffered terribly. Again Satan was proven wrong.

We see that up to this point, Job fared rather well. He demonstrated genuine moral qualities and true reverence for God. He loved the truth and was a man of righteousness. He did not merely appear to have these qualities because of God's protection over him or because he had been blessed with abundant material wealth.

Job began to waver

However, as we continue to read the story of Job, we notice he began to falter. But why did he falter? Was it in line with Satan's insinuations about him, in the direction of Satan's challenge? Was it because he lost all his possessions and suffered personal pain? Was it because he could not endure the pressures of society upon him, having lost his reputation and being misunderstood and despised by others?

We have seen how Job suffered greatly in various aspects of his being—physically, mentally, emotionally and also in his spirit. No one seemed to truly understand him or give him true support and comfort in his hour of trial. Above all, Job thought that God was the One who was against him and afflicting him and he was unable to reach God for an explanation of what was happening to him. Indeed, how many of us can go through properly the afflictions that Job went through?

Yet, in spite of the harsh afflictions that came upon Job, let us take note of three points.

a. Job did not curse God as Satan had predicted

Satan had said that if God were to remove His protection from Job, Job would curse Him. Even Job's own wife provoked him to "curse God and die" (Job 2:9). She probably did it under Satan's instigation so that Satan might be proven right. However, despite all the afflictions engineered by Satan and the instigation of his wife, Job did not curse God throughout the trials; he also did not abandon the worship of God or stop walking in the truth. On this score, Job did not fail God in the manner Satan had predicted.

b. Job was committed to truth and righteousness

Throughout the trials, Job continued to love truth and righteousness. Although it was not perfect, his heart was set in that direction. He did not discard the values he held dear out of frustration, bitterness and anger or because he was deprived and afflicted.

c. Job's basic failure involved questioning God, His character and ways

Job faltered during the trials, not because he had no true reverence for God or that he was not prepared to endure suffering and deprivation. Rather, it was because he was perplexed and disturbed with his situation, and because he was unable to reconcile what he was going through with his faith in the good and just God. He also felt that he did not have recourse to sort out his perplexities with God and to obtain justice. He could not "find" or reach God and this aggravated his sense of frustration.

This was compounded by other deficiencies present in him, such as an inadequate posture of unwavering commitment and submission to God and His ways, and the lack of a humble spirit. In the context of the severe afflictions, Job became overly conscious of the adverse circumstances he was in and failed to maintain his focus on the greatness and goodness of God and began to waver and, at times, questioned God in an improper manner.

Job vindicated God's appreciation of him

From our reflections, we can say that Job worshipped God and lived a life of truth and righteousness not simply because of the hedge that God had built around him. This point comes through in a striking manner at the end of the story in Job 42. We see that while Job's perplexing questions remained unanswered and while he was still suffering pain and deprivation, Job repented, and he worshipped God and submitted to Him. It was only after Job repented that God restored his fortunes.

We can say then that Job did vindicate God's appreciation of him expressed in Job 1 and 2. He passed the test of Satan's challenge to God concerning him.

Personal reflection

There are two issues that I wish to bring to your attention. Firstly, even though Job did not falter primarily because of his suffering and deprivation, they did affect him. They contributed to the pressures upon Job and, together with the deficiencies within him, caused him to lose his focus on God and to question God and His character and ways.

Secondly, the challenge of Satan to God does not concern only Job, but also the whole of mankind and God's intentions for man. Job had demonstrated by his life that it is possible for man to genuinely love the truth, walk in righteousness and worship God, independent of outward blessings, material well-being and the comforts of this life.

If we profess to love the truth and worship God, but do so only when there are outward blessings, it is not true worship. If we waver when the outward blessings on our lives are adversely affected, the meaning of our worship of God and love for truth and righteousness will be brought into question.

True worship of God and true righteousness are independent of outward blessings in our lives. We worship God because of who He is—the One who deserves our worship—and not because by doing so, we can have material advantages and the comforts of this life. Similarly, we should walk in truth and righteousness out of the conviction that this is how we should live.

This, I believe, is an important lesson that God desires to teach us from the Book of Job. What is the quality of our love for God? How pure is it? Do we really love truth and righteousness? Will we continue to do so even when we are severely afflicted and deprived? Will we continue to love God and walk in the light as children of light? The answers to these questions are vital to the meaning of true moral and spiritual qualities of a person, which God desires to nurture in us.

These moral and spiritual qualities within a person form the basis for a deep and meaningful relationship and fellowship with God and with others. The more we nurture and develop these qualities (by co-operating with the Holy Spirit in what He seeks to bring about in our lives), the richer will be our lives and the deeper and more meaningful will be our relationship with God. However, if we love God and rejoice in Him only when He blesses us with the comforts of life, then that kind of relationship with God is superficial and not precious to Him.

2. Was God satisfied with Job?

The second main issue we want to consider is: Was God satisfied with Job and the way he went through the testing? We can look at this issue from two angles.

God was satisfied

From one angle, we can say that God was satisfied with Job because he fared commendably compared with how many others would have fared in similar circumstances. He passed the test of Satan's challenge and insinuations, even under trials and afflictions of the severest kind, and thus vindicated God's appreciation of him. We see God commending Job not only before the trials began (Job 1:8), but also at the end of the whole episode (Job 42:7-8). God commended him for speaking what is right. This is likely to refer to how Job conducted himself during the trials although it may also include the repentant attitude he had towards the end. Taken as a whole, we can say that God appreciated the qualities in Job's life.

God was not satisfied

But from another angle, we can also say that God was not really satisfied with Job and how he went through the trials. He rebuked Job in strong terms for speaking in an improper manner. We read of the rebukes in passages such as Job 38:1-4 and Job 40:1-8. In the latter passage, we see God reprimanding Job for being the faultfinder contending with the Almighty and reproving God (v. 2), and one who would annul God's judgement and condemn Him so that he might be justified (v. 8).

Why was God not really satisfied with Job and why did God rebuke him so sternly? How can we reconcile this with what was said earlier, about God being satisfied with Job? I will offer two reasons:

- *God expected more from a person like Job and had expected him to fare better.* Notice how the Scriptures, in Job 1:1, 3 and 8, portrays him as one who was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil and the greatest of all the men of the east. Job was a man of moral and spiritual stature.
- *The seriousness of the issues involved in Job's failures.* Job was found to be deficient in his posture towards God and in the spirit of humility. These are important issues to God and have significant implications to a person's relationship with God. They have to be dealt with effectively and deeply and cannot be glossed over, especially for a person like Job, who had the potential for a high quality relationship with God.

God's rebuke of Job may appear harsh, but it befitted the occasion and achieved the desired result. It led to Job repenting and adopting a proper posture of humble submission and worship of God, not of a superficial kind, but a posture that had depth and quality in it.

God was satisfied with the outcome

Thus, we see that while God was not satisfied with Job for his improper posture during the period of testing, He was satisfied with the outcome. In Job 42, we see that God restored the fortunes of Job, increased all that Job had twofold and blessed his latter days more than his beginning. Job had a deeper relationship with God as a result of the trials. But how deep it was, we do not know. It would depend on the depth of Job's response at that point in time in Job 42:5-6, and how he nurtured his life subsequently. The fact that Ezekiel 14:14 held Job up as a man of righteousness suggests that Job continued to fare well. The way the apostle James refers to Job as a positive example of the outcome of the Lord's dealings is consistent with this picture (Jas. 5:10-11). The outcome of Job's story is a happy one and we can rejoice in it.

Reflection: God's way of dealing with us

In the previous message, I pointed out a lesson we can learn from the way God dealt with Job. I will now elaborate on it. Often, we prefer to be dealt with gently, gradually and leniently rather than strictly and firmly, whether directly by the Lord or indirectly through His servants. But this is not necessarily more helpful for us. When we falter and are not dealt with firmly, it may be because we are not in a position to receive it properly due to the lack of qualities within us. So, the Lord may not deal with us in that way even though it is better for us if we are able to take it and respond well. Let us therefore not always prefer to be treated gently and leniently.

When God wants to bring out the best in a person's life, He may subject him to strict discipline. Any slight deviation or slackening may be quickly pointed out or dealt with. But God may not point it out to those who are lax and complacent.

However, I am not suggesting that this is the only way to understand God's dealing and we should not take it as a licence to treat others strictly and harshly, saying that it is good for them. There is certainly a place for gentleness in the way we treat others just as God often treats us and deals with us gently.

Likewise, let us also not think that when the Lord deals with us strictly and severely, it must be because we have good qualities within. It could be because of our stubbornness that God has to resort to this way of dealing with us before we will pay heed.

God deals with us in different ways and for different reasons. Let us therefore learn to be discerning and not conclude wrongly one way or another.

3. Appreciating the meaning of the episode

The third issue to consider is the appreciation of the meaning of the whole episode. Some people who read the Book of Job may have the sentiments that this book is just a terrible record of intense suffering. Questions may arise in their minds: Why did God allow Job to suffer so much? Why did God allow Satan to afflict Job so severely? Was Job a mere, helpless object in a contest between God and Satan? Is there any good coming out of this episode?

To answer these questions, we need to first see very clearly that it was definitely not a game between two powerful beings. Very significant issues were involved. God in His sovereignty and wisdom permitted Satan to afflict Job as part of the outworking and fulfilment of His ultimate purpose and intentions for Job.

God had dual aims in allowing Satan to test Job: Firstly, it was *because of His love for Job and concern for his ultimate well-being*. Secondly, it was related to *the establishment of His eternal kingdom*.

Comparison with Joseph

We can compare what happened to Job with what happened to Joseph who suffered at the hands of his brothers. There is a similar principle in operation.

Genesis 50:18-20

18 Then his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants."

19 But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place?"

20 "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.

Out of jealousy and with evil intent, Joseph's brothers sold him as a slave to Egypt. Although God had allowed it, His intentions were different. He meant good and He did bring about good, that is, to preserve the lives of many people during the famine. The adverse circumstances that God allowed Joseph to go through as a result of his brothers' negative conduct were also helpful for Joseph's learning and development and to equip him for the role that God intended him to fulfill as ruler over Egypt.

Similarly, God, while allowing Satan a certain measure of power to operate, intends to bring good out of the evil design and intentions of the evil one.

However, it is important to take note that although God intends good to come out of such situations, the outcome may not always be good. *Rather than being a mere, helpless object, man's response and the way he exercises his choice (with God's enabling) are crucial to the outcome.* And often, the outcome will affect not only the life of the one concerned, but also the lives of others and God's eternal kingdom.

Examples of the apostle Paul and King Saul

Let us look at the apostle Paul and his response when he was severely afflicted, buffeted, harassed and opposed by the powers of darkness. He writes in Ephesians 6:12 that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against... the spiritual forces of wickedness". While God had allowed Satan to operate with evil intent, His intentions for Paul were good. On Paul's part, he responded well and constantly exercised his will to choose God's ways. He was able to testify near the end of his life that he had fought the good fight and that a crown of righteousness awaited him. The positive significance of Paul's response extended far beyond himself; he contributed significantly to the building of God's kingdom.

On the other hand, King Saul, as king of Israel, was in a favourable position to do good and to positively affect many lives. Instead, he gave room for the powers of darkness to work in his life, and became an ugly, negative and destructive person who committed many evil deeds.

What, then, should be the proper perspective towards Satan at work and trials and difficulties that we go through? The apostle Paul puts it very beautifully in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18:

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

16 Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.

17 For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,

18 while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

In this passage, Paul tells us that when we encounter trials, we need not lose heart. If our attitude is right and we respond well, such trials would result in our inner man "being renewed day by day" and the outcome will be an "eternal weight of glory". The glory of the outcome would make the difficulties we go through seem like "momentary, light affliction". The "eternal weight of glory" or positive outcome that can come about is so much more significant that Paul uses the unusual superlative expression "far beyond all comparison".

However, such a frame of mind and perspective as we go through trials and difficulties is possible only if we learn how to perceive the issues of life from the eternal perspective (v. 18).

The meaning of what Job went through

Coming back to Job, what is the meaning of this episode in his life? I will summarise them in the following main points:

a. Man can have genuine moral qualities

Through this episode, God is demonstrating an area of truth vital to the fulfilment of His eternal purposes for man. That is, it is feasible for man, in spite of his weaknesses and frailties, to develop genuine moral qualities and to love God and truth independent and regardless of circumstances and maintain them in the midst of adverse circumstances. Job vindicated God's confidence that this is feasible for man.

When Satan issued the challenge to God, he was questioning the very foundation of God's kingdom and the fulfilment of God's purpose for man, because if man has only superficial reverence for God and love for righteousness, there would be no real basis for the fulfilment of God's purposes and the outworking of His kingdom.

For God's kingdom to flourish, it requires genuine moral qualities, true reverence for God and true love for one another. It must not be merely because of material advantages and the comforts of life that we worship God and obey His commandments. The apostle Paul puts it this way: the kingdom of God does not consist of eating and drinking but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17).

b. God's purposes in suffering are meaningful

In allowing Job to go through the fiery trials, God intended Job to attain to a higher quality of character, faith and relationship with God. This took place through an exposure of the deficiencies in Job, thus allowing Job to address them and take

corrective measures. Job emerged from the trials with a higher quality of humility and a better posture of worship and submission to God. He might also have learned the importance of going through situations of life focusing on God rather than being overly conscious of the circumstances and difficulties.

Whether or not Job had any understanding of God's intention, in the midst of his suffering and stumbling, he did utter words of truth:

Job 23:10

"But He knows the way I take;
When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.

Job affirmed that he would emerge a better person through the testing that he was going through. While Job's suffering was temporary, the positive development of his being and the quality of his relationship with God were not only meaningful while on earth, but had eternal significance.

c. Greater effectiveness in service

The positive development in Job's being and character and in his faith would not only have benefited himself, but would also have resulted in a more effective testimony and positive impact on the lives of others for the remaining years of his life. Job 42:16-17 tells us that he lived another 140 years, and died "an old man and full of days":

Job 42:16-17

16 After this, Job lived 140 years, and saw his sons and his grandsons, four generations.
17 And Job died, an old man and full of days.

The trials and testing would have helped him relate with others and minister to them with greater understanding and deeper humility. This would likely have taken place, given the lesson on humility that Job himself had to learn, having been despised, rejected, mocked, misunderstood, and having experienced perplexity, the loss of property and loved ones, and suffering severe bodily pains. Having gone through such experiences, he would be in a better position to understand the suffering of others.

Even his experience of failure and his subsequent repentance would have helped him to be more understanding towards others who fail. If Job's weaknesses had not been exposed, if his life had been plain sailing, it would have been more difficult for him to empathise with human frailties and failures. Besides, he could be under the false notion that he did not have those deficiencies. That would be a wrong understanding of himself. Thus it was helpful that Job's deficiencies were exposed.

However, it does not mean that we have to experience failures to understand and empathise with others. The Lord Jesus lived a perfect life but He is understanding towards us, with all our failures and deficiencies. But for many, the experience of failures is helpful. We become more understanding towards others who fail, yet without condoning their wrongdoing or sin just as God did not condone Job's wrongdoing but dealt with it definitely. Job had to repent so that he could continue on well and enjoy the blessings of God.

As we go through trials, the critical issue is to go through them well and with good attitudes. If this is so, the trials can be rather helpful. Through them, the weaknesses in our lives are often exposed and dealt with. Our lives will then be developed and purified and we will be more equipped for ministry. Positive qualities already present could also be deepened and strengthened.

d. Job's contemporaries could benefit from Job's experience

Job's three friends and all who knew or subsequently heard of what he had gone through could also learn much from his experience.

e. Job's story benefits Christians through the centuries

Through the centuries, readers of the Scriptures can benefit much from the record of Job's story. That's the chief objective of considering these issues with you in this book.

Together with what has been covered in the other messages, one important lesson we can learn from the story of Job, which is in line with the words of assurance of the apostle Paul in Romans 8:28, is this:

Whatever may happen to us, however difficult the circumstances and the afflictions of the powers of darkness, however improper and unfair the treatment by men, we can be assured of meaning in what we are going through and positive outcome for our lives as long as we continue to love God and persevere in faith.

f. God was glorified through this episode

This is a corollary to point (a). The whole episode that Job went through glorified God. The way God dealt with Satan's challenges and the way He dealt with Job manifested His wisdom and vindicated His purpose in the creation of man. Satan might have cast insinuations on Job's character and faith and sneered at God's purposes, yet through Job, God has shown that His purposes for man are not a futile dream. In the context of all the frailties and weaknesses of man, it is possible for him to genuinely worship and love God, and truly live a life of truth and righteousness.

It will come to pass that there will be moral beings with positive moral and spiritual qualities, who freely choose to love and worship God, and love one another in truth and purity, now and in eternity.

g. This episode manifests God's sovereignty

This episode underlines the truth that God is on the throne and whatever takes place, including the work of the powers of darkness, can only be within the framework of what God allows. Because God is perfect and loving, we know we can have true security. We need not be anxious or fearful as long as our hearts, our will, our direction and our longings are aligned with His. We are safe in Him; our well-being and security are assured.

The story of Job, instead of giving us a feeling of helplessness and sadness, is a story that should lift our hearts and spirits and give us deep confidence in God and in life, knowing who God is and His intentions for our lives.

Concluding remarks

Having seen the experience of Job, let us reflect on the following questions. Do we have the right perspective towards suffering and pain? Are we willing for our deficiencies to be exposed? Are we willing to be corrected and to repent? Do we purpose in our hearts to vindicate God's intentions for our lives, not allowing the evil one to triumph over us, but instead overcoming his evil designs?

Let us co-operate with God to bring about the good that He intends in our lives and through us, in the lives of others. If there are areas in our lives that are hindering God's working or that are open to the manipulation of the powers of darkness, let us sort them out before God and allow Him to deal with them so that we may be purified.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Was Satan triumphant in his challenge to God concerning Job? Elaborate.
2. Was God satisfied with how Job went through the testing and with the outcome? Elaborate.
3. What is the meaning of the whole episode? Why did God allow Job to go through so much pain and suffering and why did He allow Satan to afflict Job so severely?

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