

To and Fro on the Earth

COMMUNION

October 3, 2021

Psalm 22:1-15

¹ Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering. ² Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and mind. ³ For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in faithfulness to you. ⁴ I do not sit with the worthless, nor do I consort with hypocrites; ⁵ I hate the company of evildoers and will not sit with the wicked. ⁶ I wash my hands in innocence, and go around your altar, O LORD, ⁷ singing aloud a song of thanksgiving, and telling all your wondrous deeds. ⁸ O LORD, I love the house in which you dwell, and the place where your glory abides. ⁹ Do not sweep me away with sinners, nor my life with the bloodthirsty, ¹⁰ those in whose hands are evil devices, and whose right hands are full of bribes. ¹¹ But as for me, I walk in my integrity; redeem me, and be gracious to me. ¹² My foot stands on level ground; in the great congregation I will bless the LORD.

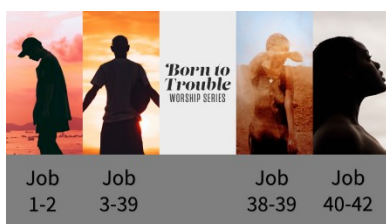
Job 1:1, 2:1-10

¹ There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil... ¹ One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD. ² The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it."

³ The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason." ⁴ Then Satan answered the LORD, "Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives. ⁵ But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." ⁶ The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, he is in your power; only spare his life."

⁷ So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD, and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. ⁸ Job took a potsherd with which to scrape himself and sat among the ashes.

⁹ Then his wife said to him, "Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God and die." ¹⁰ But he said to her, "You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.



Today we begin a new worship series based on the book of Job. Written in approximately 1,900 BC, this book predates the writing of Genesis by about 450 years. It is

the story of Job, a righteous man who responds with faith to the difficulties that life brings. The first two chapters, which we will explore today, deals with Satan's attempts to test Job's faith. Chapters three through 39 deal with Job's friends trying to offer explanations for his suffering. These three friends question Job's righteousness. We will look at these interactions next week. The third section of Job is God's response to Job.

God speaks out of the whirlwind in chapters 38 and 39, which we will explore on October 17. And lastly, in chapters 40 through 42, Job responds to God, humbling himself before God. As we wrap up this walk through the book of Job in week four, we will build our understanding about God and about our relationship with the divine. As we begin today, let us pray...



The first verse in the book of Job reads, *"There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God*

and turned away from evil." The land of Uz was an area south of modern-day Israel, in the area where Abraham would later settle. Job was a man who walked closely with God. Today we might describe him as walking the straight and narrow. In the rest of chapter one Job is described as a man who was blessed. He had ten children, great herds and flocks of animals, and many, many servants. Job is described as *"the greatest of all people of the east."*

Job even guarded closely over his children. The seven sons would have great feasts, each taking turns hosting the great feasts. After the feasting was over, Job would send them to be purified and he himself would offer sacrifices for any sins they had committed, saying, *"It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts."* Job was very diligent about staying righteous and upright before the Lord his God.

Job is not the only character in the story. There is God, Job, and his wife. There is Satan. It is important to note that Satan is not the adversary of God, but a holder of an office in the heavenly court. At this point in the Biblical narrative, Satan is the accuser. Think of Satan as a prosecutor in today's courtroom. It is in this role that Satan raises a question or an opposition to God's boasting about the character of Job. Many scholars interpret this role as a prosecuting attorney, a part of the council of heaven, a partner, even as a co-worker with God.

It is in this setting that one day the heavenly beings gathered before God and God inquired of Satan about what he had been up to. In response, Satan says, *"Going to and fro on the earth, walking up and down upon it."* Satan has been out and about, doing his thing. God then asks if he has considered his servant Job, reminding Satan that there is no one like Job on all the earth. Satan fires back that God has put a fence around Job and blessed everything that he has touched. In these ways the book fits very well into the Israelite understanding of blessings and curses. If you are righteous and upright, then God blessed you. If you sin or do evil, then God cursed or punished you. This basic understanding of how God operates carries throughout the Old Testament and into the New Testament. It is important to grasp this in studying the book of Job. It will be especially important to remember next Sunday as we interact with the conversations that Job has with his three "friends".

Righteous/upright = blessed

Sin/evil = cursed/punished

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Satan argues that if God allows what Job has been blessed with to be taken away that Job will curse God. What else would an upright man do when life seems to turn against him? In short order Job's livestock are carried off or are consumed by fire and all ten of his children are killed in a violent windstorm. As messenger after messenger arrives with bad news upon bad news, we would imagine that Job would be rocked, shaken, filled with doubt.

Yet, in chapter one, verses 20 through 22, we read,
"Then Job arose, tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell on the ground and worshiped. He said, 'Naked I came

from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.' In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrongdoing." Job mourns, as we all would. Then Job recognizes that God is in control. Job acknowledges his finite human nature and then praises God. This passage speaks to Job's righteous, to his steady faith.

²⁰ Then Job arose, tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell on the ground and worshiped. ²¹ He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." ²² In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrongdoing
 - Job 1:20-22



We began our time of worship with a reading from Psalm 22. This writing from David echoes the ancient understandings concerning blessings and curses. David

voices the common understanding that walking with integrity and faithfulness is pleasing to God. David reminds God that he does not sit with mockers or with sinners or with hypocrites. This reminder is coupled with the plea for God not to sweep him away with these evildoers. Instead, David asks God to redeem him and to be gracious to him, to bless him. Hear again these words in verse eleven:
"But as for me, I walk in my integrity; redeem me, and be gracious to me."

Although David echoes ancient understandings of blesses and curses, David also voices a prayer, speaks words, that we do or will pray or voice. At times we all wonder why something bad happens to good, faithful people. Instead of staying here, though, David 's grateful response is to bless the Lord in the great congregation, again echoing Job's words from the end of chapter one. David's words echo the reality that we spoke of two weeks ago – all of us are living in the tension between the ways of the world and the ways of God.



As chapter two begins in the book of Job, once again the heavenly beings gather before God. Once again Satan reports that he has been going to and fro on the

earth. Once again God asks about Job. I think God is a little proud of Job. God says to Satan, *"There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity."* Even though Satan has taken much from Job, even though he has brought deep pain upon the man, Job remains true to his faith.

Satan wants to push Job a little further. He says to God, in verses four and five, *"Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives. But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face."*

"Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives. But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face."

- Job 2:4-5

It is interesting to realize that Satan thinks we are selfish – that we will do anything to save our own hide. I think in most cases, he is right. Selfishness is common to humanity. And selfishness can easily lead us to wander, to go astray from our faith. In our world, human failings are all too

prevalent. And yet there is a striving for uprightness, for being blameless. And the whole point of the book is that even if we could achieve such a state, we would not be immune from suffering. Random stuff happens. Even the health conscious can succumb to illness. Even the safety conscious can suffer an unforeseen accident. As we have seen more recently, even those who have taken all the precautions, who do all they can to keep themselves safe, even they can come down with COVID.

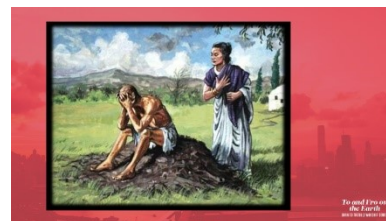
There is, however, a mindset that declares that faith protects, that faith earns a bubble that ensures that nothing bad will happen. That is why often those who are stricken abandon their faith because they believe the promise was not kept. If we have lived very long at all we come to know that the rain falls on the righteous and the unrighteous, that the good and the bad both suffer. So, if we are to work towards our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, then we all need to go through the experience of wrestling with Job. It is one of the ways that we can learn to cling to our faith, even as we live in this random world. Learning this lesson reduces the selfishness inherent in all of us as well.



In today's passage, there are two human characters – Job and his wife. As we consider the story, we quickly realize that we have all been in or have stood close to the shoes that Job and his wife stand in. We have all found ourselves face to face with loss, with death, with illness or disease. But before we look at the responses of his wife and of Job, let us take full stock of their grief.

It is important to fully understand what Job and his wife were coping with. Rustlers didn't steal a couple head of cattle; they stole the whole lot - 500 yoke of oxen plus 500 donkeys. A few sheep didn't just wander off, shepherds unable to locate them. All 7,000 sheep were consumed by fire. A few camels did not die of thirst in the parched land of Uz – all 3,000 camels were stolen away as well. Then Job loses not one child but all ten in one catastrophic event. The shepherds and servants who were tending to these animals, the servants at the house of his son – all were killed or consumed by the fire. Just four servants escaped to tell Job of each succeeding disaster. Can you imagine what it would be like to endure all of these losses, in such rapid succession?

Returning to our passage as we pick it up in verse seven, Satan leaves the heavenly gathering, and he afflicts Job with sores. Job is covered from crown of his head to the sole of his foot with painful sores. Instead of breaking, Job shaves his head, sits down among the ashes, and tends to his sores with broken pottery. Job assumes the place of mourning, saddened by all that has befallen him. And he mourns. This is where and how his wife finds him. She too has experienced great loss. She too is deep in her grief.



Now, we've all been where the wife goes. As she approaches Job, seeing him covered in sores, she must have thought, 'Really God, one more thing?!' And we've all been where Job must have at least approached – almost ready to give God a piece of our mind, to really let God have it. But Job is holding onto his integrity, to his faith.

His wife comes and says to him, *"Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God and die."* Just get it over with honey. What else could God bring down upon us? No, never mind, just cuss God out and die, end this suffering. Some of these words come from her understanding of blessings and curses, right? Job must have really sinned big time to be bringing all this suffering on the family.

So, we have all been where Job is in this moment too. We have all had bad things happen to us and have had someone else voice questions about our choices or behaviors, about us being the cause of the suffering that we are experiencing. And, like me, you've probably wanted to scream at them: 'I didn't do anything to cause this... I don't deserve this!' And here is where we need to take a lesson from Job. He first calls his wife into account.

In the first part of verse ten Job says, *"You speak as any foolish woman would speak."* He is reminding her that this is how faithless women would speak. This is how women succumbing to fear and grief would speak. Job is reminding his wife that they are people of faith, that they are people of God. Returning to the idea that God both gives and takes away, drawing her back to this reality that has guided all of their lives thus far, Job continues, asking her, *"Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?"* Faith cannot waver at the change of fortune, at the time of trial, during the walks through the valley. Just as God is ever present in our highs and lows, so too are we to be faithful in all times of life, in all that life brings.

"You speak as any foolish woman would speak."

- Job 2:10a

"You speak as any foolish woman would speak."

- Job 2:10a

"Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?"

- Job 2:10b



A quick review: up to this point, Job has led an exemplary and disciplined life. He was running a successful business, was leading a large family, and was faithfully following God. He is hit with tragedy after tragedy after tragedy after tragedy. While he mourns deeply for his losses, we read, *"In all this Job did not sin with his lips."* Job models the kind of faith that we are called to live out.

In this life, we all experience hardship and suffering. Evil and disease and disaster and hardship are always moving to and fro on the earth. We can relate to the things that must have gone through Job's mind as his world crumbled around him. We can also see the faith that Job walked with through these valleys.

In the weeks ahead we will walk with Job through the testing or questioning of his faith, with him into the realization of God's power and might and sovereignty, and then we will witness the restoration and contentment found in Job's continuing relationship with the Almighty. Join us each week as we walk out our journey of faith with Job and with God. Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. In life we all endure trial and hardship. When and how have these experiences deepened your faith? Are you willing to share these learnings with others as they walk through the valleys?
- 2) *Pray*. When has prayer brought relief or assurance or comfort in the midst of life's hard moments? How can you teach others these practices?
- 3) *Study*. Read Job 2:11-13. How do these three friends' actions reveal their love for Job? When have you experienced such love in a difficult time?