

January 15, 2016 “The Dark Figure In The Bible” Job 1:8-12

Some of the great stories of our time, JR Tolkien's “Lord of the Rings,” and George Lucas's Star Wars, and even J.K. Rowling's “Harry Potter” series have borrowed this fundamental concept from the Bible. To make sense of what we observe in every day life, not only is there a gracious, loving, creating and redeeming God who is Almighty, but there is also a dark figure who delights in destruction, death, mayhem, and anything that can promote suffering. And while this dark figure, this prince of death, Satan, is part of the explanation of the reality of human suffering, the primary claim made in this first chapter of the book of Job, is that Satan is every bit as real as is the loving Lord, God Almighty.

The image with which the writer Job presents us, is a kind of congress, a general assembly of angels if you will, in which these other worldly beings are giving account to God of their work, and Satan, attends this meeting. The Lord our God in conversation with Satan draws attention to the man Job. God describes Job as a singular man of faith, blameless and upright. The Lord says Job is a man who fears God, which does not mean he is afraid of God, but that he believes, and because he is a believer, Job seeks to avoid evil.

Job is a good man. We need to remember that in Biblical terms that does not mean he is perfect or never does anything wrong, but rather he believes in God, he worships God, he keeps the commandments as much as he consciously can. He strives to do the right thing at the right time. He is not looking for trouble and he is not careless when it comes to his lifestyle. He has worked hard to build a farm, and the result of his hard work is that he has done well. He is rich. As most of us would have to admit we are rich. We eat well. We have stocks of clothing. We are warm in the winter and we

cool our homes in summer's heat. And we, like Job, endeavor to keep the faith, by which I mean we expect to have to work at making our faith real, impacting how we treat others and how we take care of business.

He has raised a family. Seven sons and three daughters. He has provided for them on this extensive farm,...flocks and herds. Job has servants...read that as staff. Clearly Job's holdings have grown to the point where one man or even one man and his sons cannot handle it all. So Job has a large staff to run his company. And life is good. And I underline that we should hold onto this thought when we read the book of Job...he is a person not unlike ourselves...not independently wealthy...but he cannot face a single day without the sense of he is a blessed man. He has so many blessings, he can readily see them and count them...Praise be to God.

And the goal of Satan in this piece is really simple. He wants to break Job. He wants to break Job for this one reason. He wants Job to cease giving God the glory for the nature of his life. Satan's accusation of God is that of course Job is faithful! It is cost effective for Job to be faithful or at least religious. In fact the accusation of Satan is that that is all this righteous man's life is about. He is religious because it pays to be religious. "God," says Satan, " You have put a hedge around Job and his household. You have put a fence around everything he has. But I will tell you what God: Strike him with hardship, you take away his toys, you deprive him of the good life he has had, and you will find how little he really cares about religion and the religious life. He will curse your name if he tastes of hardship and challenge."

I want you to take note of what Satan's challenge really is

the Scripture. He dares God to cause the hardship of business reverses. He dares God to deprive Job of the pleasure of a loving family. He dares God to inflict pain. His assessment of Job is really this. He does not really believe. It is the difference between faith and religion. Religion is a system. Not a relationship a system. Satan says to God, what amounts to, if you take down the fences that protect him, if you uproot the hedges you have built around him, you will discover he is hollow to the core. It has paid for him to be religious. And he will cast it aside in an instant, and he will show you how little he really cares for you, Lord God, Almighty!

The first thing I want you to notice about all that is that God refuses to cause Job's suffering. It may seem here that I am splitting hairs, but the issue is real. God refuses to cause Job's suffering. What God does is this: He permits, Satan to touch the wonderful lifestyle Job has been enjoying. But He sets a limit as to what Satan may do. "Everything Job has is in your hands. But on the man himself, do not lay a single finger." And from that point on it is Satan who turns up the heat and causes Job to experience all manner of pain. The Sabeans attack and they rustle the oxen and the donkeys, beasts of burden. They kill the servants of Job who were managing that part of the farm's operations. And the Chaldeans attack and make off with his fine camel herd, and they kill the staff that were caring for that herd. And fire falls from the sky and destroys Job's sheep and the shepherds. A wind storm sweeps through the area and Job's children were together having a party and in one stroke the disaster has claimed their lives, and the staff that were with them.

Job's grief is real. His pain is real. The tearing of his robe and the shaving of his head are the outward signs of his losses and

his broken heart, typical responses in his culture. But. And it is a big But...Job is a wise man even in grief, even in the discovery that he has lost his wealth...he prostrates himself before God and he worships the Lord. I called Job a wise man for a specific reason. We have just left Christmas and the wise men behind us. They searched for the Christ child...why...because they wanted to worship HIM. To recognize the Christ child for who HE is...King of Kings, Lord of Lords, the One who will save HIS people. Job in his grief and loss does the very opposite of what Satan said he would do. He recognizes he serves the God who has sustained him through all of his living. This marvelous confession of faith in the face of life disrupting suffering... “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.” Job is a believer. He was a believer and he still is a believer. And the score in this game of life is God and His servant Job 1, Satan zero.

The story of Job has a second chapter. In it, there is a second congress of the angels and once again Satan attends the gathering. The conversation predictably comes round to Job. God has reminded Satan of his limitations...required that he report on his movements...And God has pointed out to Satan that he was wrong about Job. “He maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without reason.” It is God's position that Job has been treated unfairly, unjustly.

And this Darth Vader of the Bible, says in reply, “Sin for skin. A man will give all he has, for his own life. Strike his flesh, strike his bones, make him sick, really sick, and he will curse you to your face.” And God says, “He is in your hands, but you must spare his life.” I really think I know what is going on here. Ever have the flu? A bad case of pneumonia? A diagnosis of cancer? At the height

5.

of any of these experiences you feel your mortality, like death is not only possible, but near. That is what Satan has wanted to be inflicted on Job. That is what he takes some horrible delight in making Job experience. Job begins to taste the suffering of Satan's turning him over the flame.

His beloved wife, loses hope, she says, "It is over Job. Curse God and die." And it is not that she is a terrible person. It is that Job is that sick. She does not know, Job does not know, that God has forbidden Satan to destroy Job's life. And she in her own bed of suffering cannot see how else this can ever end. Job's overall attitude is, "Shall we not accept good from God, and not trouble?" It is a second version of "the Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Praise be the name of the Lord."

Here is my point. The story of Job places the responsibility for his suffering squarely on the shoulders of the dark figure in the Bible called Satan. He is not God. He is not equal to God. He is subject to the limitations of what God permits him to do...but he is devious and awful and relishes the taste of suffering. He is the arch villain of life. I am not a superstitious man, but the Bible is specific on this matter of why do bad things happen to good people....and at least part of the answer is because there is one who is the essence of darkness, where Jesus is the light of the world. Satan, Beelzebub, the Devil...the Bible says he is real. He introduces chaos to our lives. He seeks the destruction of our faith relationship with God. He sought to tempt Jesus away from the path of redeeming us. And by the grace of God he failed. Praise God Satan failed. He failed to break the faith of Job. And may the grace of God save us when trials beset us, when temptation assails us, and when we are tempted to think all is lost.

Let us pray;

Heavenly Father, Redeeming Son, Holy Spirit enabling us to follow the way to life everlasting, renew our hope of salvation in Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. When we are in danger be with us. When we cannot see the light, give us light seeing sight. When we suffer, minister to us so that we may pass through the fire and the flame to experience the cooling bath of grace all sufficient. Teach us that strength involves contending with evil by calling on your name. Cleanse us and heal us in the precious blood of the lamb once slain and raised that we might have life and have it with You our Lord and God. Amen