

“From Bad to Worse”

Job 2:1-13

Last summer, several news agencies reported the story of a man who lived in upstate Illinois who just so happened to be working outside in his yard on June 20 when the tree next to him was struck by a lightning bolt. The electrical charge traveled through his body but didn't kill him. ABC News 7 out of Chicago said that the man ended up in the hospital with some broken ribs and heart problems. As they were interviewing him, he told them that he had been struck in the same spot some 18 years earlier. The man said, “Everyone keeps saying that I am a lucky person,” but how lucky can you be if you get struck by lightning twice? In a strange twist of irony, the man's name is Rod.

I've heard it said that lightning never strikes twice. Our friend Rod would certainly disagree, and so would Job. When it seems that things can't get any worse for him, we will find out in chapter 2 that they most certainly do.

Life is full of unexpected bumps along the way. Sometimes, the next bump is harder than the one before it. The times we live in are tough, and everyone you meet is fighting a battle or searching for a bandage. And yet it is through tough times that God tests our faith so that it might be strengthened. You can look at adversity in life in a couple of ways. On one hand, you can view it as a stumbling block and get bitter about it. Or, you can view it as a stepping stone and get better because of it. The choice is yours to make.

Physically, stress is what grows our muscles. Spiritually, stress is what God uses to stretch our faith. Job endured the stress of all stresses. He went from the top of the mountain to the bottom of the valley all in a day's time. Satan attacked his life in an attempt to get him to renounce his faith. While the devil intended for the bumps in Job's path to destroy him, God intended for those same bumps to develop him.

What Satan intends to destroy us, God uses to develop us. We will see from this chapter how things went from bad to worse in Job's life. Sometimes, from our limited perspective that seems to be the way it is. However, we must remember that the night always grows darker before the impending sunrise.

We learn from this passage that there are no easy answers for the problems of pain and suffering. Just when you think that things cannot get any worse for Job, they do. Satan's attack

of Job's life in chapter 1 comes in the form of losing fortune and family. In chapter 2, it will come in the form of Job's physical health as well as his closest relationships. Chuck Swindoll refers to Job as "a man of heroic endurance" who faces life's most severe trial. Among other things, chapter 2 shows us how he endures the words of a grieving, shortsighted wife as well as the accusations of three friends who assume the role of judge and jury.

Job gets knocked down, but he is not knocked out. He is tested, but he is not defeated. He will enter the thickest part of the battle where he will be wounded, but he will emerge victorious bearing his scars.

Let's step into the classroom with Job and see what we can learn from his example. Three more "knocks" that Job will face involve him being victimized again by the enemy, criticized by his wife, and sympathized by his well-intentioned, but ill-informed friends.

1. Job is VICTIMIZED by his accuser (2:1-8)

"Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the Lord. And the Lord said to Satan, 'From where have you come?' Satan answered the Lord and said, 'From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.' And the Lord said to Satan, 'Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him to destroy him without reason.' Then Satan answered the Lord and said, 'Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse You to Your face.' And the Lord said to Satan, 'Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life.' So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. And he took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes."

At the end of the first chapter, Job has lost his livestock, his servants, his wealth, and his children. Satan assaults him relentlessly in his attempt to destroy Job's faith. In chapter 2, we see that the devil is not too quick to admit defeat. He will try once more to destroy Job's faith, but this time he will attack Job's physical health.

Satan's accountability (v. 2)

“The Lord said to Satan, ‘From where have you come?’”

Much like we have already seen in the previous chapter, verse 1 says that there was again a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord. Satan is once again among their number to present himself before the Lord.

Once again, the Lord God asks Satan, “From where have you come?” This is not a question asked for the sake of information, but for the purpose of accountability. Satan’s answer is the same as it was in verse 7 of the previous chapter—“From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.”

Erwin Lutzer - *“The biblical portrait of Satan is that he does indeed have great power, but that it is always limited by the purposes and plans of God. It is a picture of a proud being who has already been humbled. It is the picture of a being whose greatest asset in his war with us is our own ignorance.”*

Satan’s argument (v. 3-6)

God asks him in verse 3, “Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? He **still** holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him to destroy him without reason.”

Job’s fortune changes, but his faith remains the same. His station in life changes, but the strength of his character remains the same.

The devil remains unconvinced that Job won’t buckle under the pressure. He makes the argument in verse 5, “Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. But stretch out Your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse You to Your face.”

The accusation is that Job’s righteousness is really self-preservation.

In other words, Job isn’t hurting enough to curse God and renounce his faith. The emotional pain of loss only goes so far. Satan’s logic is that if Job hurts physically as well as emotionally, then it will lead to his breaking point. Physical suffering on top of emotional suffering will prove to be too much for his faith.

2:6 - “And the Lord said to Satan, ‘Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life.’”

God gives Satan permission to have access to Job's physical body, yet it is limited access. Satan must spare Job's life, meaning that he cannot kill Job. Once again, this merely illustrates that Satan cannot touch the life of a believer without receiving divine permission.

Satan's attack (v. 7-8)

Verse 7 says that Satan went out from God's presence, and he "struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head."

"Loathsome Sores" - *perhaps a reference to a disease known as a dreaded form of black leprosy; others have suggested that it was an aggressive form of skin cancer like melanoma*

When you read carefully through the book of Job, you will find that there are several different references to the symptoms that were associated with Job's physical illness:

- inflamed, ulcerous sores, persistent itching (2:7-8)
- degenerative changes in facial skin and disfiguration (2:12)
- loss of appetite and severe depression (3:24-25)
- sores that burst open and scab over, and worms that imbed themselves in the sores (7:5)
- difficulty in breathing (9:18)
- darkening of the eyelids (16:16)
- foul breath (19:17)
- loss of weight (19:20; 33:21)
- continual pain (30:27)
- high fever with chills and discoloration of skin (30:30)

From what we read throughout the book, we get the idea that Job's physical suffering is immense and ongoing. Job's condition resulted in his isolation from people and relocation to the city garbage heap. As he sits by himself, in an attempt to numb the pain of the sores, Job takes a broken piece of pottery and scrapes his blistered body as he sits among the ashes.

Many of our brothers and sisters understand the pain and suffering that is often brought on by physical illness. It may be cancer that ravages the body, alzheimer's that ravages the mind, or some other form of debilitating disease. Yet no matter the form, the enemy will try to exploit our weaknesses so that he might destroy our faith and diminish our contentment in Jesus Christ.

He will often fill our minds with negative thoughts:

- If God truly loves you, then why doesn't He heal you?
- What have you ever done to deserve such suffering as this?
- Can a God who allows you to hurt like this really be trusted?

Satan and his demons will do all they can to flood your mind with doubt, to fill your mind with worry and anxiety, and it is all a subtle attempt to distract you from worshipping God.

Satan is a liar and a thief who wants to kill your faith and rob your joy.

2. Job is CRITICIZED by his wife (2:9-10)

"Then his wife said to him, 'Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die.' But he said to her, 'You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?' In all this Job did not sin with his lips."

To make matters worse, Job's wife tells him to do the very thing that the enemy wanted him to do—curse God and renounce his faith. But before we get too harsh in our critique of Mrs. Job, we need to keep in mind that she lost her livelihood also. Those 10 children that died were her children also. She is hurting, and she sees her husband being reduced to a crust of bread, and in her mind she believes that it would be better for him to die rather than suffer so.

Stephen Davey - *"If Job is the epitome of suffering, then [Job's wife] becomes the poster child of secondhand suffering."*

What is secondhand suffering? It is the adverse affects experienced by people who are the closest to those who are suffering.

- The husband whose wife is in the grip of chronic depression
- The wife whose husband has been diagnosed with terminal illness

- The parents whose children have made terrible choices

Though you may not be the primary one who is suffering, you love the one who is, and you therefore share in their grief. Job's wife is a profile study in secondhand suffering.

When we meet Mr. and Mrs. Job, both of them have been married for a very long time. We know this because their children are grown. They have experienced a wonderful life, for God had blessed the work of Job's hands. When they were first married, the thought never entered their minds that they would lose everything they had while in the prime of life.

LXX - *"Then after a long time had passed, his wife said to him, 'How long will you persist and say, Look, I will hang on a little longer, while I wait for the hope of my deliverance? For look, your legacy has vanished from the earth—sons and daughters, my womb's birth pangs and labors, for who I wearied myself with hardships in vain. And you? You sit in the refuse of worms as you spend the night in the open air. As for me, I am one that wanders about and a hired servant—from place to place and house to house, waiting for when the sun will set, so I can rest from the distresses and griefs that now beset me. Now say some word to the Lord and die!'"*

You had better be careful when it comes to following the advice of other people, even those closest to you.

Satan will tempt us to sin against God through misguided counsel.

Matthew 16:21-23 - **"From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'Far be it from You, Lord! This shall never happen to You.' But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are a hindrance to Me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.'"**

Satan can work through people who are dear to us, and the temptation is stronger because we love them so much. Adam listened to Eve, and Abraham listened to Sarah, but Job did not listen to the counsel of his wife.

His rebuke (v. 10a)

His rebuke of his wife is very gentle. Notice that he doesn't attack her, nor does he lash out against her in his pain. He does not call her a foolish woman, but simply points out how her words are lacking faith.

Job says to her in verse 10, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak." In other words, he is saying that she really doesn't understand the seriousness of what she is saying.

His rationale (v. 10b)

Job says, "Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" Notice he speaks plurally—"we." He does not assign blame. Job says we can't be selective when it comes to our faith. We trust God in the good times, and we trust God in the bad times. He is the Potter, and we are the clay.

Robert Alden - *"This is a hard lesson for some believers to learn, especially if they feel they have been promised health and wealth or have misunderstood that God's wonderful plan for their life involves only pleasantness and not trouble. Believers on this side of the cross have many more examples from both the Bible and church history of God's people who have suffered. Job was much more in the dark. Yet out of that darkness his strong belief in the sovereignty of God shown forth all the more brilliantly."*

In the midst of his pain, Job reaffirms his faith in God. We should enjoy the good times and be filled with gratitude. When hard times come, we continue to worship rather than abandoning our faith, the very thing that Satan wants you and me to do.

His restraint (v. 10c)

The end of verse 10 says, "In all this Job did not sin with his lips." I find that to be a remarkable statement that testifies to Job's integrity.

Sometimes, we lack restraint when it comes to our words, especially when we are around those closest to us. In our 13 years of marriage, Anita has heard me say things that I would be ashamed for anyone else to know. We tend to be unguarded in our words when we are around those we are most comfortable being with.

The easiest way for us to sin against God is through our words.

Proverbs 10:19 - “When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is wise.”

The more you say, the more prone to sin you will be. The only words that Job speaks are words of worship and wisdom.

Job’s wife is a lesson about how to deal with indirect pain and suffering. Here’s the truth about indirect pain:

- It **touches** us differently, but it is just as deep

Though it is different, indirect pain can be as sharp as direct pain and suffering, and it is often more difficult to express. While someone who is directly suffering will say, “I’m hurting,” the one who is watching that person suffer is unable to relieve the pain of their loved one, and this is very painful in itself.

- It **tests** us differently, but is it just as serious

Job’s wife is evidence of this. She has already come to the conclusion that life is not worth living, revealing to us that she has reached the point of despair. Her husband once sat in the city gates as the most respectable man in the east. Now, that honor is gone, and in her mind, so is their hope.

- It **teaches** us differently, but it is just as important

She must learn what we all must learn—that our hope is in Christ, never in our circumstances.

3. Job is SYMPATHIZED by his friends (2:11-13)

“Now when Job’s three friends heard of all this evil that had come upon him, they came each from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They made an appointment together to come to show him sympathy and comfort him. And when they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him. And they raised their voices and wept, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads toward heaven. And they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.”

Satan has launched an all out assault on Job in three arenas—his body, his soul, and now his spirit.

Why they came (v. 11)

These three men come with noble intentions. They want to comfort and console Job in his time of suffering.

“Sympathy” - *word means to show compassion on*

“Comfort” - *to ease one’s pain; to sigh with*

What they did (v. 12-13)

Job’s friends identify with his pain. They tear their robes, weep with him in his agony, and sprinkle dust on their heads. Most important, they don’t say a word for seven days and seven nights, for they see that his suffering is very great.

Whenever pain seems to multiply in your life, and when things seem to go from bad to worse, here’s what Job teaches us to do:

- Receive what God gives you with humble compliance
- Restrain the words of your mouth with great caution
- Rely upon the truth you know with total confidence
- Release your situation to your faithful Creator

1 Peter 4:19 - “Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.”

However deep our suffering, it is unlikely that our experience has been quite like Job’s. We have neither been as great as Job, nor have we fallen into such a pit as he did. This simply means that Job’s suffering points us to a greater fulfillment than your life or mine. Job’s suffering points us to the suffering of Jesus.

We can’t fully understand Job apart from the light of the gospel.

Christopher Ash - *“Job in his extremity is actually but a shadow of a reality more extreme still, of a Man who was not just blameless but sinless, who was not just the greatest Man in a region, but the greatest human being in history, greater even than merely human, who emptied Himself of all His glory, became incarnate, and went all the way down to a degrading, naked, shameful death on the cross, whose journey took Him from eternal fellowship with the Father to utter aloneness on the cross. The story of Job is a shadow of the greater story of Jesus Christ.”*

When we read Job’s story and are confronted with all that endured, we can’t stop until we get to Jesus—the One who suffered for us, who secured our redemption, and whose suffering was vindicated by His glorious resurrection.