

# Stories of the Promise 3) Job – “Persevere”

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We live in a one-minute, quick-fix, instant-oatmeal society. What do I mean by that? If people don't get what they want right away, they get upset. If it takes too long for an order someone today might leave a bad review online. And if internet or cell phone service drops for a few seconds—we consider it the worst of evils. Really it isn't just today's society. It has always been this way. All people of all ages have always been intolerant of the slightest hassles. The child throws a temper when denied a toy. A spouse refuses to talk or show affection when denied some personal whim. Aren't we all born with one-minute, quick-fix, instant-oatmeal hearts? When something is taken away, love grows cold. It ebbs at just the slightest sign of hardship. That type of love is, of course, only based on a shallow, superficial thing. What about shallow love for God? Or closely related, shallow faith? Do we ever seek an immediate response from God in order to believe he truly loves us? Do we ever pull away praise when he fails to immediately pull away our pains and fill us with pleasures? Today we read of a man who by all appearances lost most of his reasons to love and praise God. The book of Job opens with a striking picture for us. It's the opposite of a shallow faith or shallow love for God. We see what it really means to live in the story of the promise, what it means to persevere.

I don't think most people realize just how wealthy Job was. With thousands of sheep, large cattle, and camels he was close to the ancient equivalent of today's multi-millionaire. Along with huge herds and flocks he had many servants. And though today a large family is not always viewed as a blessing, in nearly every Biblical record large families are considered a great blessing from God. That was the case for Job with his ten children. Job was blessed in every way! In his day he was called greatest man in all of the East. But we read that Job was about to have all his prosperity come crashing down into a heap of rubble. He was going to face the crisis of a lifetime.

We get to read the dialogue between God and Satan, the one called the accuser. Though Satan doesn't have access to God's counsel or presence, God has something to say to Satan. With all of Satan's wandering about the earth, he couldn't have missed Job. And Satan would have been most frustrated by him. Job was a rich man who honored God. Satan couldn't get him to turn aside from the Lord. Job even confessed sins and offered sacrifice on behalf of his children just in case they had done any wrong. So, God boasts of his servant Job, "Consider him! How much he loves me, honors me!"

But Satan, in all his wickedness will not acknowledge Job's faith as genuine. Satan knows the quick-fix, instant-gratification hearts which we all have. And he was determined to prove that Job had shallow love for God. "Does Job love God for nothing?" Satan questions. "Look at the life you've given him! Look at the blessings he holds! Of course he is going to praise you." Then the return challenge comes: "But take away all these things, and I know Job's love for you will grow cold, and he will curse you to your face." Give him a setback, Satan says, and his love for God will drop back!

What if Satan would challenge your faith and love for God in this same manner? We certainly can relate to Job in comparative wealth. Many of us have received numerous blessings from God. We can pray to God saying, "Thank you for my job, thank you for my house, thank you for my food, my family." But what about when these things are no longer there? This is what Satan was allowed to reveal in Job. God was still in control, but he allowed Satan to follow up on his accusation against Job. He allowed him to take away Job's blessings.

And it came upon Job hard! And in a single day a wave of losses came piling over Job. His oxen, donkeys-- gone. Raided and taken. His sheep: struck dead, servants also killed suddenly. And through these first reports of loss Job remained silent and took the blows. You can picture the stunned face of a millionaire who just lost everything in a stock-market crash. Shock left him speechless. But the next wave of loss had to have been something that would drive any man or woman to the deepest pits of despair. Children are a blessing from God. Job knew this. Job showed that he deeply cared for his ten children. Don't think he loved them any less than you love those close to you in your family. He loved each one I'm sure as much as you love those dearest to you. All ten died at once as the house they were in collapsed. When calamity comes, doesn't it sometimes feel like it hits in cruel wave after wave? When you face one trial and think, "Okay. I can manage this. It's just one more straw." It just then that not only does a last straw come to break your back but a whole brick-load of pain. Job now had nothing. Nothing left but a wife, who we later see had turned from the Lord and scolded her husband for not joining her in cursing God.

Satan went to great lengths to remove many of reasons Job had for praising God. But does he always have to go to such great lengths to reveal a shallow faith? Sometimes he can topple someone's faith simply by toppling the unstable pedestal it is set upon. If our love and trust in God is based on our day-by-day prosperity, our love and faith is on shaky ground. Satan knows that for some hearts if you take away their prosperity you take away their religion.

The believer might say, "God took away my wealth for a good reason; he still loves me." But along will come Satan to try and finish the job with his lies. "How can you say God loves you? It doesn't look like it now?!" The believer might say, "I lost everything and had to file for bankruptcy, but God is still working all things for my God." But Satan will be constantly reminding that Christian "Why? How do you know? Hasn't God given up on you? Why should you still praise him?" And with agonizing heartache you and I may cry in faith, "I will miss my loved one who has died, but God has delivered them,

for that I am thankful.” But Satan will have you hearing the words of unbelievers around you, “Are you still praising God? Even after he has taken someone from you?”

It might be easy to say, “My faith and my love for God will persevere.” I’m sure John the Baptist probably thought that too, until he was taken and tossed in prison. Then he didn’t see all the things which he had foretold about the coming of the Christ. Things were bad, and his faith faced a hard road. Who can say that they will never doubt the goodness of the Lord? Don’t we really walk around with one-minute, quick-fix, instant-oatmeal hearts? If we aren’t happy and satisfied, it doesn’t take us long to show it towards other people. Can’t our love and trust in God also be shaken? And when it is what ought God to say about such a shallow and empty faith?

Surprisingly, Job wasn’t shaken. Job’s response was not a stoic and forced show of “nothing is wrong.” He didn’t hide the tears or crawl into a corner to mourn. He was in pain. He had reason to grieve. The customary signs of grieving were a torn garment and a shaven head. He showed his grief. But what no doubt smacked Satan in the face was what followed and accompanied Job’s grieving: an act of worship!

How was Job able to praise the Lord for his goodness even as all those blessings were taken from him? Before we rush to put Job on a pedestal of ‘perfect example’ we need to ask why he even stands in the posture of worship amidst calamity. It is not because of his own inert goodness, but because he so well understood the goodness of God, despite all appearances to the contrary. He didn’t live by day-to-day prosperity which is so fickle. He lived by the unshakable promises of God. Job had faith in the Lord who was good –and who carried out his good plans no matter what the appearances may seem at the time. Not only had he been materially rich, he was rich in faith and love for the Lord.

In faith Job knew God is a God of grace. He gives us all we have, and we deserve none of it. In Job’s own life that all he ever had was a gift of God’s grace. “I was born naked.” Job says. He knew that he would hold nothing in his hand, have no clothes, no cattle, no home, not even a spouse or children if the Lord hadn’t in his grace provided them for Job. Job knew the Lord’s goodness. His lack of possessions was not an indicator of God’s lack of goodness toward him. Nor did it mean that God was punishing him.

That’s because he knew that the Lord is a God of mercy. Job knew that the Lord would forgive sins. That is why he had a heart of faith that would come to the Lord often seeking forgiveness. And Job knew that if the Lord who forgives sins wanted him to go without his other blessings, God still loved him. Job took his own sin seriously, knew God’s love, and thanked God with praise. This is what foiled Satan’s attack: a heart which knew the Lord as the God of mercy and love – despite the lack of lesser blessings.

This is the way that our God works. He doesn’t work according to our fickle perspective of time and blessing. His way is beyond ours. Instead of focusing on when those blessings are not there, we can focus on what blessings were there in grace, and what blessings will continue to come by God’s grace. And we can remember always his mercy for sinners.

At times our trust and love in him will be tested. And it won’t stand unless it is based on his mercy and grace. Picture what it was like for the people at the first coming of the Christ. Did it look like things were going their way when the Romans ruled over the people of Israel? Was there going to be a King of Peace for Israel when the Romans now controlled the land? And what did it look like for Mary and Joseph? Was that God’s plan? That the Christ be born in such a humble way? And John the Baptist, the great prophet himself doubted for a time if this was how God was supposed to be showing his kingdom -in lowliness and humility while his chief herald was tossed in prison. Things weren’t going as expected.

But it was in all this lack of prosperity and abundance of trials that God worked out his plan of goodness. It wasn’t a cheap quick fix that we could pay him for. It was a priceless and everlasting fix he earned his own blood. Jesus came as the Christ in such a way that many were offended and said, “This can’t be what we were expecting.” He came in poorness, from a broken line of kings, in a broken kingdom, for broken people. He came to suffer loss and pain beyond all even Job ever faced. But despite all appearances God is always working his good plan. In Christ he worked that plan to display his mercy and love. You want to see someone persevere under pressure? Look to Jesus. He did to the very end for us. Jesus the Christ, against all expectations died on the cross. It was in that suffering that our forgiveness of sins was won. And it is through his unexpected but long foretold rising to life that we rejoice in possessing eternal life.

Satan went to great lengths to remove many of reasons Job had for praising God. But he couldn’t remove them all. He couldn’t take away the greatest reason for praise. God knew all along that Job’s faith was not shallow, but real, and centered on trust in his mercy and grace. It’s a story of the promise of God centered on Jesus. Your love for God and faith in him don’t rest on the immediate situation. They rest on his promises and his faithfulness. This is how it was at the first coming of Christ and this is how it still is for us now until Christ returns.

Don’t let Satan’s accusation of a shallow love and shallow faith stand. Persevere with the promises of God. By God’s working, we know the depth of the love that God –no matter what. His love for us is never shallow or fickle for us. It doesn’t waver but is based on grace; it is everlasting and beyond our understanding. This Advent remember the story of Job. It’s a story of the promises of God which led him and leads us all to trust in the goodness of God and to persevere.

