

Satan: Be afraid. But Don't Be Afraid.

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April 24, 2016

1. Introduction

The world is full of calamities: destruction from earthquakes, hurricanes, war. On a more personal front, we are battered by cancer, job loss, divorce, abuse. Why do these things happen? They seem evil. So we wonder if Satan is involved. Because these evil calamities are so prevalent, we wonder if knowing more about Satan can help us combat the trials. Christian and non-Christian have many ideas about Satan's aims and power. Just what can he do and what can't he do? And what is he trying to achieve? Finally, where is God in all this?

The book of Job brings clarity to these questions. If you brought your Bible, and I hope you have, please turn with me to Job chapter 1. If you didn't bring a Bible with you, Job chapter 1 is on page 417 in the pew Bible. If don't have a Bible at home, we would love for you to take home the one that is in the pew.

* Read text

Job 1:1-2:10

* Pray

2. Story Background

The book of Job is a story. It is presented as a true story, although we don't know when Job lived or where the land of Uz was located. The story includes some characters: Job, God, Satan, Job's wife, and some friends of Job. The story includes one more participant: the story teller or narrator. We never see him, but everything in the book except the dialog belongs to him. For example Job 1:1 is the narrator talking. When you read Job, you can trust the narrator. What he writes is true. But you can't always trust the characters in the story, sometimes they speak the truth and sometimes they don't. One other character in the story is completely trustworthy: God. Whenever you hear God speaking in this book, you can believe him.

3. Job not suffering because he was a sinner

So what does our trustworthy narrator tell us about Job? Let's look at the first verse of the first paragraph in book. Job is blameless, upright, he fears God, and he turns away from evil. Just in case we need more proof, the LORD says exactly the same thing about Job in v. 8. Job was a man of the highest moral character. He was righteous. You could trust

him to do the right thing in almost every circumstance. He was a God-fearer. That's good – if you want to be a God-follower, you must be a God-fearer. And he was a repentant. We see that in the phrase in v. 8, “turns away from evil.” To repent means not just to feel sorry about your sin, but to turn away from it. Job did that over and over.

Why is this at the top of the story? God wants us to know that Job's suffering was not punishment for his sins. Romans 3:23 says that all people have sinned, all people who are alive today and all people who have ever lived. So we shouldn't wonder if Job was sinless. No, Job was not sinless, but God himself calls Job blameless and upright.

* Summary

Big idea #1: Job's suffering was not because he was a sinner.

4. Satan's aim

Then why is Job suffering? The answer is revealed in the conversation between the LORD and Satan starting in v. 6. God asks Satan where he has been. Satan answers that he has been walking around on much of the earth. He has been looking around, noticing things. God asks Satan if he has considered the LORD's servant, Job.

Why does God ask Satan if he has considered Job? Listen to how Satan responds. “Does Job fear God for no reason?” That is the point of discussion between the LORD and Satan. They are arguing about the reason Job fears God. More precisely, what motivates Job to fear God?

What motivates you to fear God? Perhaps you are thinking, I didn't know I should fear God. You should not fear God like a 6 year old fears a monster in the closet. But you should fear God like the apostle John in the book of Revelation. When he saw Jesus Christ standing before him as the matchless King of Kings, as the all-powerful one, “he fell at his feet as though dead” (Rev 1:17). Why? Isaiah has a similar response and he tells us why in Isaiah chapter 6. After Isaiah sees the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, after he hears of the Lord's holy, holy, holiness, after he sees the whole earth full of the Lord's glory, Isaiah responded, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

Why should you fear God? We ought to fear God because he is always right and always good. We ought to fear his judgment of our sins, for our sins are neither right nor good. And we ought to fear walking away from him and his ways. Walking away from God is another way to describe sinning. This kind of fear looks like respect, honor, submission, obedience. How do you know if you fear the Lord? You will give weight to his words. A person who fears the Lord will want to know what God says ... about anything. A person who fears the Lord will do what God says and his conscience will be very bothered when he doesn't. So, ask yourself, are you like Job ... do you fear God? [pause.]

If so, what motivates your fear of God? Is it because you know you will go to hell if you don't and you really don't want to go to hell? Is it because God rewards you with a good life and you really want that? Or do you fear God because you really do see him as the most right, good, loving master you can imagine?

Why does Job fear God? Satan thinks he knows the answer. He tells God that Job only fears him because God has made him prosperous and rich. Satan is challenging the motive behind Job's fear of God. Why does this matter to Satan, to God, and to us the readers of this book? If Job worships and fears God for God's sake, then Job's life is evidence that God is worthy of worship. But if Job worships and fears God only because God gives Job the possessions and riches he wants, then Job's life is evidence that possessions and riches are worthy of worship. In that case, God is just a vending machine for getting what you want.

So Satan throws out a challenge to God. He challenges God to remove Job's possessions and riches. Satan is sure that then Job will curse God to his face. This is Satan's aim. In all his works, Satan's aim is to undermine the worship of God and thus to rob God of the glory due him. Satan does all that he does to make God look bad. Satan hates when God looks good. He hates it when God is worshiped. He is furious when God is seen as glorious and worthy.

* Summary

Big idea #2: Satan's aim in all that he does is to make God look bad.

5. Satan's power: great

How does he do that?

Notice what happens next in v. 12. God accepts Satan's challenge and grants Satan permission to do what he wishes with all Job's possessions. So what does Satan do?

In v. 13-19, four great calamities fall upon Job. These are the works of Satan. Let's learn from these the kinds of things of which Satan is capable. First, he can bring groups of people, in this case the Sabeans and the Chaldeans, to steal and kill livestock and people. Second, Satan can cause the fire of God, perhaps terrible lightning, to burn up livestock and people. And third, Satan can cause a great wind to blow that destroys a house and the family inside. We see here that Satan is a thief, destroyer, and murderer. And he uses other people and powers of nature to accomplish his evil deeds. Satan's power is great. He can do much damage on the earth.

* Summary

Big idea #3: Satan's power is great.

6. Satan's power: limited

Are there limits to Satan's power? To answer this, let's consider the origin of Satan. Angels are created beings. And like all of creation, they were created "very good" according to God in Gen 1:31. But by the time of Gen 3, we find Satan in the form of a serpent tempting Eve to sin. Very bad. Very evil. So sometime between creation and the fall, some the very good angels became very evil demons. And the head of those demons is Satan or the devil as he is sometimes referred to in the NT.

Back to our question, are there limits to Satan's power? Yes, because he is a created being, he has limits. Only God is infinite or without limits. Satan is not God. What are some of these limits?

Only God is omniscient, all knowing. The Bible never describes Satan or angels as all knowing. Only God is omnipresent, that is, can be everywhere at the same time. The Bible never describes Satan or angels as being able to be at two places at the same time. Only God is omnipotent or all powerful.

God describes himself in [Isaiah 46:9-10](#), "... for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, [how so?] ¹⁰ declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.'" Did you catch that? God says here that only I, God, know what will happen and only I am powerful enough to accomplish my purposes all the time. Not angels. Not man. Not Satan.

So Satan's power is great, but limited because he is a creature, not the Creator.

But Satan's power is limited even more. And that is good news for us. We can see this here in our passage in Job. Look with me in 1:12, "And the LORD said to Satan, 'Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand.' So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD." God set the bounds for Satan's work. And Satan stayed within those limits when he brought calamity upon Job. We see the same thing in ch. 2. God granted Satan permission to touch Job's bone and flesh. But God set a limit: to spare Job's life.

Almighty God, the Creator, sets the limits of Satan, the creature.

* Summary

Big idea #4: Satan's power is limited.

7. God's aim

Earlier we said that Satan's aim in all that he does is to make God look bad. God has an aim too, in all that he does. What is it? Why did God start this story in motion by taunting Satan with the question, "Have you considered my servant Job?" Job's righteousness and fear of God and repentance from evil are a testimony that God is worthy of worship, more than possessions and children and health. God's aim in all that he does is to show his great glory. By glory we mean his character and works. Do you know anyone as all knowing as God? Anyone as wise? Anyone as loving? Anyone as pure? Anyone as strong? Do you know anyone as merciful to people who mock and oppose him? Friends, God's glory is great. And it is for our joy that he reveals and shows it to us. Satan's aim is to mask God's glory, to work so that people doubt God's glory. But God's aim in all he that does is to show his great glory. And he intends that to produce hope and joy in us.

And we testify to God's glory when we are satisfied in him above all else. When we are satisfied with God, we join God in showing his great glory to others, we join God in glorifying God. This is what we were made for and this is what makes us most happy, now and eternally.

This is what Job was doing by his life. He was glorifying God. And Satan was sure that Job was a faker. Satan told God that Job wasn't really satisfied in God, but that Job was only satisfied in the gifts God had given him: riches, family, and health. And God was sure that Job was a man of integrity, that his God-prizing character went all the way through him.

* Summary

Big idea #5: God's aim in all that he does is to show his great glory.

8. God uses Satan's works for good

Here is the question that will lead us into our last Big Idea. If Satan has an aim to make God look bad and God has an aim to make God look good, then why would God grant Satan permission to do anything? Why would God help his enemy? Why would God grant Satan permission to bring these calamities on Job?

Look with me at 1:20 for the answer. *Read 1:20-21.* Job says something unexpected here. What is it? Job says that God has taken away all that he has. We read the story. The story clearly implies that Satan was responsible for Job's calamity. Might Job be mistaken? The narrator anticipates our surprise and our doubt about this. So he inserts v. 22, "In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong." The narrator is telling us that Job was right when he gave credit to God for the calamity.

And just in case we think this is a one-time anomaly, look at 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.” Again Job says that God was responsible for the calamity that came upon him. And again, the narrator wants to make sure we understand that Job was not wrong about this.

So who is responsible? Did Satan bring these disasters upon Job or did God? The text says that they both did. But to say that Satan and God cooperate would be misleading. Remember that Satan’s aim and God’s aim are opposed to each other. So Satan was not trying to do any good to Job or to God when he brought the calamity upon Job. He was trying to harm Job and harm God’s reputation. But God was aiming for good. And God always accomplishes his aims. Remember God says about himself, “My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.” God brought these disasters upon Job for good, using Satan’s works.

It takes a deep trust in God to believe that. And that’s what we see in Job. “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” And, “Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?” The Hebrew word for evil here can also mean disaster. Do you hear Job’s faith? These aren’t light and fluffy, happy expressions. Job is mourning his very significant losses. Imagine losing all your children in one day. But his mourning hasn’t snuffed out his trust that God is good and sovereign. Job is mourning and worshiping. He is grieving the calamities and trusting that God is doing good at the same time.

* Summary

Big idea #6: God uses Satan’s works for good.

9. Practical Tips

Now let’s consider some practical tips for living out these truths.

* Practical Tip 1

Recall that we said Job’s suffering was not because he was a sinner. He was a sinner, of course. But his suffering didn’t come because of that. Perhaps you are not as upright and blameless as Job, yet the calamities that come in your life are not always due to your sins either. When trouble comes, resist letting your first thought be, “Okay God, what have I done now?” I don’t tell you to resist that thinking because you are sinless. You aren’t. But you ought to resist that thinking because on the whole God doesn’t use calamities now as a punishment for sins. He does sometimes (see Rom 1:18). But in the main, he uses calamities as a parable of sins. When you see the destruction brought on by a calamity, let it remind you of the much worse destruction brought on by sins, yours and

others. When troubles come to you, God hasn't come to spank you, even though you deserve that. When trouble comes, God has come to remind you of your sins and your need to transfer your worship to him and call upon him to be saved. Practical tip 1: When calamity comes, resist thinking, "Okay God, what have I done now?"

* Practical Tip 2

Satan's power is great. We see in Job that he is able to use other people and weather to accomplish his work. So, on the one hand, fear Satan. Don't play a kids game of "Na, na, na, na, na" with Satan. As the bigger kid on the playground can say, he can whoop ya. Yet we also saw that his power is limited, limited because he is a creature, he is not God. Satan does not know what you are thinking. Satan does not know what will happen in the future. And Satan does not have all power. Furthermore, Satan is limited by the bounds God sets for him in his every move. Satan never does anything that God doesn't permit. So on the one hand, fear Satan. But on the other hand, don't fear him. The only trouble he can bring to you is trouble God has ordained for you. And you know that if you are a God-follower, a God-fearer, a repentor and truster in Jesus, a Christian, then every trouble that comes your way is for your everlasting good and joy. God never wrongs his children. Practical tip 2: Fear Satan, but don't fear him.

* Practical Tip 3

Satan and God have opposing aims. Satan's aim in all that he does is to make God look bad. And God's aim in all that he does is to show his great glory. Certainly Satan and God are in a fierce battle. Yet, God never loses even one skirmish. So when a big trial comes to you, don't waste your strength trying to figure out if the trial is from Satan or from God. Use your strength to resist Satan's attempt to get you to curse God. When you suffer a big loss, even the loss of a very good thing – home, children, ministry, marriage, job, health – Satan will leverage your love for that good thing, for that gift from God that is now gone. He will try to inflame your sin nature to see the loss of the good thing as proof that God is bad. Satan will point your eyes to God with angry cries of, "Not fair! Not right! Where are you anyway? So is that what your love looks like?!" You will move from being God's subject to being God's judge. When that happens, Satan is winning. As I said, use your strength to resist Satan's attempt to get you to curse God.

The fight at that point is a fight to see clearly. When our love for God's gifts are eclipsing our love for God, we, not God, are in the wrong. What to do? How can you clean the eyes of your heart?

- Read your Bible to see once again that the things "that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal." (2 Cor 4:18).
- Go find some good preaching that will remind you again, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. ²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." (Psalm 73:25–26).

- Grab a Christian friend and may they kindly ask you “have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? ‘My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. ⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.’” (Hebrews 12:5–6).

Only the power of God’s word can change you when you are tempted to curse God. Using that power, go on to win the battle. When do you win the battle that Satan is instigating in your life? Not when your trial ends, but when you fear God, worship God, obey God, in the midst of your trial, in spite of your trial. Practical tip 3: Use your strength to resist Satan’s attempt to get you to curse God.

10. Conclusion

1 Peter 5:6–11 ⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. ⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. ¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

* Pray

God please hold on to us so that we can hold on to you. Give us a solid trust that your aims for good are being accomplished in our trials. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.