

# JOB'S SECOND TEST

## Job 2

By Leo Douma  
11<sup>th</sup> February 2007

A Jewish rabbi wrote a best selling book called “*Why do bad things happen to good people?*” (Some of you may have read it). The title implies that something is not right if good people suffer. If bad people do stupid things and create their own suffering, we can understand that. But suffering that (randomly) strikes good people doesn't seem to make sense; it's not fair. That's the feeling you get when you read Job. From our study of chapter 1 last week we saw how it made clear that Job was an exceptionally good man. The very first verse of the book says “*This man (Job) was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil.*” The scene in heaven showed God and Satan talking and God holding Job up as an example of a “servant” of God. God called him “*blameless and upright, fearing God and shunning evil*”. Even after Job was tested, when Satan took away and destroyed all he owned and all his children, we read that Job “*fell to the ground in worship...Job did not sin by charging God with wrong doing.*” Now, as we get into chapter 2, we see that God is still singing the praises of Job. The scene is again in heaven where the angels came to present themselves before God. Satan is there again as well (Note verses chapter 2: 1 &2). Then notice verse 3 “*Then the Lord said to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil... And still he maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason.*” God initiates the discussion about Job. He is obviously delighted with his servant, one who has indeed brought glory to God by his faithfulness in his suffering. This is now the third time we are told Job was “*blameless and upright, a man who fears God*”; Twice by God himself. So you can't miss the point can you? Job is a good man. This is vital information when we get into the long arguments between Job and his friends. We see here how God has a strong word for Satan: “*you incited me against him for no good reason*”. Now in this you notice how God takes responsibility for what happened to Job. Satan stirred up trouble, but God is always sovereign. It is interesting that throughout this book as Job raises his issues, his complaints are against God, never Satan. At the end of the book it is God and Job that are reconciled; Satan doesn't come into the picture again after this chapter. We see also how God says Job suffered “*for no good reason, without cause.*” He did not suffer for doing wrong. This wording focuses on the crux of Job's testing. It is difficult enough to endure a hardship if there is a good goal (cause) in sight. You can even cope if

you know it's your own fault, there's a cause/reason for your suffering. But to undergo random suffering, to go through awful struggle, plunges a person into agonizing self doubt. You end up thinking: "I must be really bad if I am going through all this! There must be something really wrong with me!" (Have you ever felt that?) To struggle with the meaninglessness of random suffering is more difficult than the actual loss you suffer. God's point of saying "*without reason... without cause*" is also a shot back at Satan who said in chapter 1: Does Job worship you "*without cause*"? Satan's point was that Job only worshipped God for what he could get, for all his blessings, and when the blessings were taken Job would curse God. Only Job had not done that. He showed his deep love for God, and worshipped him, whatever God gave or took away. So in a sense God says: "Satan, admit you were wrong".

But Satan we see in verses 4&5 is undaunted in his attitude. He persists in his skepticism. He implies Job hasn't really been tested, that God set up too many restrictions the first time round. Look at what he says (:4) "*Skin for skin...A man will give all he has for his own life. But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face.*" 'Skin for skin' seems to mean that a person will exchange anything he has for something else of similar value. Basically Satan is saying that a human being is utterly selfish, completely self centred. A person will give up anything, even their prize possessions and even family, as long as they can hang onto their own life. Satan seems to know a lot about the dark side of humanity, about our willingness to walk on anyone, to betray or sacrifice anything as long as we are OK, as long as we can live. He assumes it of Job as well. "God, let Job get real sick, deathly ill, let him stare death in the face and he will curse you". So, again God allows Satan to strike out at Job, but, again he sets the boundary-(:6) "*you must spare his life.*" And again Job has no idea of this exchange between God and Satan.

The verses 7-10 brings us out of heaven and back to the scene on earth. We see that Job is terribly ill. He is covered with "*painful sores*", or boils, from "*the soles of his feet to the top of his head.*" We don't know what exactly the illness was. Job describes some of his symptoms in his speeches in the following chapters, things like disfiguration, purulent sores that scab over, crack and ooze, sores infected with worms, fever with chills, darkening and shrivelling of the skin, eyes red and swollen from crying, diarrhoea, sleeplessness and being delirious, bad breath, excruciating pain throughout his body. Job was suffering from multiple complications. Not knowing how God had restrained Satan,

Job would have felt for sure that he was a dead man. He is seen as cursed and he sits outside the city in the town's ash heap. It was the rubbish dump, where the ash from the cities ovens was dumped, as well as all the town rubbish. The smell of the place would have been putrid. Job sprinkles dust on his head, rolls in the ash, and sits on the ash heap. It was the ancient way of expressing one's deepest grief. There sits Job all alone, totally isolated from the community in which he was once considered the "*greatest man in the east*". Instead of being the respected figure he is now the butt of gossip and jokes. Not only has he lost everything, now even his health, but he is utterly humiliated. He sits there in silence, a broken man, mourning his terrible fate. We can only begin to imagine the deep depression that Job is sinking into, the way his loss and grief and dreadful illness are affecting his mind. From time to time he scrapes himself with a bit of broken pottery. It might cause more bleeding, but it relieves the awful itch, the endless irritation of all those boils.

Now onto the scene, for the first time comes his wife. Perhaps she has always been by his side, but now the writer widens the camera angle and shows her there. Job's desperate plight provokes her to cry out: (:9) "*Are you still holding onto your integrity? Curse God and die!*" What are we to make of this? Is she speaking for Satan, encouraging Job to 'curse God'? She uses the same expression as God (in verse 3) when she speaks of Job's integrity. God saw it as Job's strength, maintaining the faith, maintaining integrity. But instead of seeing it as Job's greatest asset she sees it as fanaticism, a refusal to face up to reality. "All your faith isn't getting you anywhere. Look at you! You are so sick you are as good as dead. Why stubbornly hang on. Curse God and die." It would seem that her thinking was to shorten his suffering. She can't stand to see him the way he is. So to lessen the time of suffering if Job cursed God then God would finish him off. While we often focus on the person suffering, their loved ones, especially their spouse, are often suffering awfully as well. I remember a time when one of my children was very ill, I struggled with God to leave them alone and let me be ill instead. We can be so frustrated not being able to do anything as we watch the one we love slowly sinking. One minute we pray for healing, then we pray God take them quickly, we get angry with each other, we get angry with God. Anger with God is a very common reaction to disaster, to suffering. The positive point to take from the reaction of Job's wife is that, like Job, it is directed towards God. The deep human emotion that is expressed here recognizes God, it sees His sovereignty, it struggles with God in belief. Better this than burying all emotion and gradually seeing our faith die off. We can feel

for and understand Job's wife. But it doesn't help him very much. In fact it puts another burden on him. As if his suffering isn't bad enough, she now tempts him on the very thing Satan is trying to achieve: Curse God. So with a strong determination not to let her words get the better of him He says (verse 10) *"You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?"* The Hebrew word for fool, 'nabal' is the strongest word for fool. It referred to some one who completely renounced God's ways. Job is not calling his wife a fool, but what she says is like what a foolish woman says. Job's wife is not an evil woman. At the end of the book we see that she and Job have many more children. But there are times when we in our frustration, anger, suffering, say things that are out of order, just as Peter did when he spoke sharply to Jesus. Jesus reprimanded Him "Get behind be Satan." Job would not curse God for his suffering. In fact he makes clear that if we accept that God is God then he determines our lives. We must as obedient servants receive what he gives, the good and the trouble. That is the nature of our relationship with God. He is Lord and master and we are his creatures living for his glory in whatever way God requires that.

Now the writer here sets up the basis for Job's struggle in the speeches that are to come. Job may well be bewildered as to why he is suffering, since he is a good man. He doesn't blame Satan, or the terrorists or cyclone that took his possessions and kids. Job insists that his suffering is from God's hand. That's the depth of his faith, and there in lies his problem. Job's keeps his integrity. He keeps the faith. He goes on trusting in God. But his faith doesn't relieve his problem, it makes it worse. Only a man with deep faith in God sees suffering as a problem. The atheist has to come to terms with suffering, but it is part of the absurdity of living in a meaningless world. There are just simply tragic accidents. But for the Christian, for Job, there are no 'accidents' in a universe ruled by the one sovereign Lord. God is both good and almighty. If God is so all powerful and so loving, then why should those who love him suffer, at times so terribly? This is the crux of Job's struggle in the following 40 chapters. While his friends push him to repent of his terrible wrong, Job keeps saying, I am not wrong. I feel God is and I want to know why? Was Job arrogant in this? Note the last part of verse 10 *"In all this Job did not sin in what he said."* The Hebrews saw a man's speech as an indicator of his soul. To keep one's speech pure meant that the heart was pure.

Now in verses 11-13 the writer sets up the scene for the 40 chapters of speeches between Job and his three friends. While they may mess up things later on, here we see

a deeply moving scene as Job's mates together agree to visit him. They come from various far away places, and met together to console and comfort Job. Good friends are not just fair weather friends. Helping in the really difficult times is what real mates do. But when they got closer to Job they were awestruck. They saw the destruction of all his property as they came through the land. And when they saw Job on the ash heap they could hardly recognize him. Words used of Jesus in Isaiah 53 do not seem out of place here: *"he had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised..."* The friends offered traditional gestures of grief. They *wept aloud, tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads*. And then amazingly (:13) they *sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.* Do you sense how deep their friendship was, how deep their ministry? Do we realize the utter importance of just being there for another, to give the space and time for a person to feel their pain and yet support from friends? Too often when we visit a friend who is hurting, we feel the need to say something, to say something apt, comforting. But too often we come out with some pious platitude, or something that comes out wrong. Often silence is more eloquent than words. If I suffer, what do I really want? Not lots of words, but simply for another's presence, some one to hold me, to stay with me, to care for me; some one to represent the presence of Christ to me. One writer has said that *"...presence is a service of vulnerability. To be present to others is to put oneself in the position of being vulnerable to what they are vulnerable to, and of being vulnerable to them. It means being willing to suffer what the other suffers and to go with the sufferer in his own suffering."* In its deepest form it is what Jesus did for us on the cross. Jesus knows what it is to suffer in our place, to bring healing through his death and resurrection. To get through suffering we need friends who go through it with us. To go through suffering we need to cling in faith to God and trust him. It means, when at times it all gets too hard, to allow God, through his Spirit, through our Christian friends, to carry us in his grace. Suffering can leave us struggling with doubts about God's love. But the Lord's Supper reminds us again of how much God gave, how much Jesus gave to have us as his own forgiven children. If God gave so much surely we can trust him. Supporting friends are also acts of grace by God, representing his never ending care, his ever present help in all our situations.