

Job 1:1-2:10 - Bair

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[0:00] I can tell you many stories of multiple women in Chicago who have had multiple children. I've stood at many a funeral for young men, children, with their whole lives ahead of them.

I've watched as bereft mothers come up to this casket wailing. Why, God, why? Through their tears. Should have another one to go to this coming Saturday.

A 21-year-old, the third child this mother has buried. But perhaps in our darker, more cynical moments, we kind of know why this happens.

I mean, we look at the statistics of Inglewood, the broken families, the drugs, the gang violence, and it kind of makes sense. We rationalize away the suffering. They've made their beds.

This is the life they've chosen. What else would they expect? It's difficult to begin a sermon on suffering. Where do you start? We're reading this story from Job, chapters 1 and 2.

[1:37] It's a familiar story for all of us. We know the plot of the book. Job loses. Job has everything. He loses everything. He sits in ashes and he argues with God. The problem, though, is if we know this plot so well, we might miss the point.

The point. What is the point of this story? The point of this story is not primarily about how to live with suffering. It is about that. But as we look at chapters 1 and 2 this morning, we'll see that that's actually secondary.

The suffering is actually secondary. The primary question is not why do we suffer, but why do we worship? Why do we worship? Job didn't live in Inglewood.

Job lived in the Uzz equivalent of a mansion in Wheaton. The text tells us of his 7,000 sheep, his 3,000 camels. This isn't the author counting his cattle so we think he's a stinky, filthy farmer.

No, so we know he's stinking, filthy rich. He's fanning his bankroll for us. This guy's got it all. He's untouchable. Massive wealth.

[2:47] The perfect family. Seven sons and three daughters. A spiritual resume that's spotless. A righteous man who rises early to pray for his children.

When we look at a man like Job, when we consider our comfortable lives in the suburbs, we see blessing. We see a good God rewarding with a good life.

But there's someone else watching Job. And there's someone else doesn't see a blessing. There's someone else sees a bribe. There's someone else says, Job isn't worshiping God because he loves him.

He's worshiping God because God pays him. His question, does Job serve God for nothing? It's actually a terrifying question.

It's a devastating accusation. Job doesn't love you. He's a mercenary. Take down the hedge. Take away the safety of Wheaton. Give him the reality of Inglewood.

[3:52] And he will curse you to your face. Friends, the question for us this morning is not the philosophical question, why do bad things happen to good people?

That's a question. But that's not the question we have this morning. The question is, for us, perhaps a more dangerous, a sharper question. Is your faith real?

Or is it a business transaction? If God stops paying you, will you stop praising him? What happens when the hedge comes down? What happens when the blessings cease?

Well, as we turn to this text, let's pray once more. Heavenly Father, we come this morning, people who have suffered, people who are suffering, people who know suffering is coming in the future.

We pray that as we read these words, as we study the life of Job, we would reflect on who you are and what it means to worship you.

[4:58] We pray in Christ's name. Amen. Well, so let's look at this text together. We start in Job 1, verse 1. There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job.

And this man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. So the narrator starts with this threefold resume. This first one is Job's spiritual resume.

There's four characteristics, character traits in verse 1 that set the stage for who Job is. And it's important because the rest of the book sets its stakes on these attributes of Job.

So these four things are, first, he's blameless. What does blameless mean? Well, it doesn't mean sinless perfection in the sense that he's never made a mistake. It means that Job is complete or whole.

Another word we can use is integrity. If something has integrity, it doesn't fall apart. Job is the same person in the dark as he is in the light. He has integrity. This is the same word used of Noah in Genesis 6, where we're told Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation.

[6:06] Noah walked with God. This is who Job is. He's blameless. He's upright. Somewhat synonymous. It means Job is straight.

He doesn't cut corners. He's truthful. He walks a straight line. But then we come to the third one, which I think is perhaps the most significant. Job fears God.

Job fears God. This isn't trembling terror, but this is a deep reverence for a holy God. Job fears God, which actually leads then to the fourth one. He turns away from evil.

The external action of that inward disposition toward God. He sees sin, he walks the other way. If you were in catechism classes, this might sound familiar.

This is repentance. This is turning away. There's this connection between fearing God and shunning evil. We saw this several weeks ago in Proverbs.

[7:04] Proverbs 3.7 says, Be not wise in your own ways, fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. That's what it means to have wisdom. And this is who Job is.

These four characteristics make up Job's spiritual resume. The point of the author is to make it clear from the get-go that whatever happens after this, it isn't because Job has some secret sin.

No, Job is the gold standard of humanity. That's his spiritual resume. We move to the material resume. This is his portfolio, verses 2 and 3.

He's filthy rich. There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. He possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys, and very many servants so that this man was the greatest of all the people in the east.

Now, in Hebrew numerology, the numbers seven and three carry special significance of completeness and perfection and wholeness. The narrator is telling us that even Job's bank account is perfect.

[8:14] All the numbers are lined up perfectly. Job has a perfect material resume. In fact, he's called the greatest of all the men in the east.

He's the celebrity CEO, the Elon Musk, only with better character, of the ancient Near East. He has the wealth, the power, the prestige, the influence to shape his world however he wants.

That's his material resume. Finally, in verses 4 and 5, we move to his priestly resume. And this is where it's most intimate. His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, his birthday.

And they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them. And he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all.

For Job said, It may be that my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts. Thus, Job did continually. In the patriarchal age, this early age of the world, the father served as the mediator.

[9:28] So, Job is serving this priestly role for his children. But did you catch his motivation? It may be that my children have sinned. Because in Job's time, there was this, and you know, throughout the ages and even in our times, there's this idea that religion is this great symbiosis, this give and take relationship, this contract.

Humans serve the gods so that the gods will protect them and bless them and give them things and take care of them. It's a business deal. And so, we might ask if we see a hint of this anxiety in Job here.

Is he praying for his children? Is he making these sacrifices for the sins they may have committed in order to keep this level of blessing from God? Is he spiritualizing his insurance policy?

If I offer enough sacrifices, if I pray enough, if I'm just spiritual enough, I can keep the hedge of protection up around me and my children.

This is really the question that drives the narrative. Is Job worshiping God or is he managing a contract? He's doing everything right. He's the best man on earth.

[10:45] And that's what actually makes him the perfect target. Now, in these two chapters, you'll notice we're jumping from earth to this throne room.

We'll get to that in a moment. And back. So, there's actually five scenes. Now, we're going to transition from earth, from this land of us, up to this throne room of God. So, we start in verse 6. Now, there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before Yahweh and the Satan also came among them. There's a lot in this one verse.

I wish we had more time to unpack what the sons of God, the B'nei Ha'elohim is. We could have a field day on that one. If you want to know more about it, we'll talk later. But we don't know exactly what these are.

There's lots of theories. Are these watchers? Are these angels? Are these fallen angels? I go more with the latter. What we do know definitively is they're not biological children of God.

[11:46] In the ancient Near East, this title, Sons of Gods or Sons of the Gods, is some kind of divine council. Perhaps like a celestial staff meeting. God is the king.

These are his vassals that he has assigned to some task. And they're reporting to him on what they've done. I lean toward the latter option because we have this Satan among them.

The Satan is with them. In the Hebrew, the article is there. It's the Satan. It's not a name yet. We're actually early in the history of the world.

And there's not a robust angelology yet. There's not a robust idea of what angels and demons and all this are. That actually comes up in between the New Testament and the Old Testament. But right now, we're at a point where this is really the title of this actor.

Later, Satan will become a name for the devil, for Lucifer. But right now, it functions as a title. This is the adversary. This is the challenger. And so, he comes and he's filling this role that God has assigned him to act as the prosecuting attorney.

[12:59] He's there as the inspector general looking for cracks in the veneer, looking for hypocrisy, looking for fraud.

He's the accuser, the ultimate cynic. He doesn't believe anyone is loyal to the king. And so, that's what he's out to prove. So, in verse 7, Yahweh asks.

One other thing here. Hasatan is the title of the Satan. Yahweh is the name of God. So, it's interesting. In our translations, we have the Lord, but it really should be Yahweh.

And then we have Satan, but it really should be the Satan. So, if I read it differently, that's what I'm getting at. It doesn't really change anything, but it's something to know. So, in verse 7, Yahweh asks where Satan has been.

And he says, I've been patrolling the earth. And then look at verse 8. Verse 8. God says to Satan, Yahweh says to Satan, Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth?

[14:04] A blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. God starts this. God's proud of this Job character.

He holds up his resume. He's like, hey, have you seen Job? Have you considered him? There's none like him on earth. If Job's guardian angel is in this gathering, he's got to be pulling out his hair saying, What are we doing?

But God knows what he's doing. He's staking his reputation on Job's response. He's saying, I know the world is broken. But look at Job.

Genuine faith exists. And here comes the sneer. The Satan doesn't deny that Job is obedient. He denies that Job is sincere.

Read with me verses 9 and 10. The Satan answered Yahweh and said, Does Job fear God for no reason? Does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has on every side?

[15:10] You have blessed the works of his hands and his possessions have increased in the land. God, Job doesn't love you. He loves the deal you've given him.

You've protected him. I can't get at him. Of course he loves you. We have this word, the hedge. This hedge. Job has this hedge. It's the hedge of Wheaton.

It's the safety, the wealth, the prosperity, the 7,000 sheep. This is the only reason Job acts righteously. You pay him to be good.

Of course he worships you. You're writing the checks. Job is, yes, in one sense putting, or the Satan is in one sense putting Job on trial, but in another sense he's actually putting God's policy on trial.

God, you're not running the universe correctly. It's a mistake for you to bless people because if you bless people, you create fake believers. Well, actually, he isn't wrong in that accusation.

[16:18] Not always. So Satan issues this challenge in verse 11. Stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face. Tear down the hedge, and the worship will stop.

Well, how does God respond? Does he protect his servant Job, this upright man? No. He accepts the challenge in verse 12. And Yahweh said to the Satan, Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand. So the Satan went out from the presence of Yahweh. God does not prevent it from happening.

But I want to note one thing especially here. There's a leash attached to this. The Satan has to come first and ask permission, but also he's given strict boundaries on, you may do this, but not this.

Yahweh is in control of this whole situation. God says don't touch his body, but he allows Satan to proceed with this test. And God's making a risk here.

[17:26] He's allowing the hedge to come down. Not because God is cruel, but because he's confident. God knows that Job is not just in this relationship for the business transaction.

And God's willing to let Job suffer to prove to the council, to prove to the Satan, to prove to Job, to prove to us that he, Yahweh, is worth worshiping even when the blessings seem to disappear. So the permission's granted. The accuser leaves the presence of Yahweh. He goes down to us where we have this unexpected Job.

And we move to scene three in verse 13. We move from this courtroom to earth.

And the scene that follows is this relentless succession, this ruthless execution of the Satan's plan. And it's designed to take our breath away.

[18:28] We can't read this and get to the end without without feeling the weight of it. Read with me verse 13.

Now there was a day when his sons, that's Job's sons and daughters, were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house. Presumably it's his birthday.

Job's firstborn son's birthday. And there came a messenger to Job and said, the oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them. Okay, so here we are on this birthday.

The donkeys are out. Everything's normal. Just a normal day for Job. And then verse 15. The Sabaeans fell upon them and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword and I alone have escaped to tell you.

Strike one. The Sabaeans raid. The oxen and donkeys are gone. The servants are dead. But before this servant can even finish what he's saying, while he was yet speaking, verse 16, there came another and said, the fire of God fell from heaven.

[19:40] The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them. And I alone have escaped to tell you. The fire of God.

This is a mystery. People want to suggest, oh, it's meteorites or it's lightning. This is an unexpected fire of God. They had words for lightning.

This is the fire of God. There's no explaining this except that it's from the hand of God. The fire of God came from heaven. The 7,000 sheep, his entire stock portfolio burned to a crisp.

And while he is still speaking, verse 17, there came another and said, the Chaldeans formed three groups and made a raid on the camels and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword and I alone have escaped to tell you.

Strike three. The Chaldeans raid. The camels are gone. More servants are dead. In a matter of minutes, Job has gone from the wealthiest man in the world to bankrupt.

[20:44] The hedge of wealth is gone but he still has his children until this fourth messenger comes, the one most to be feared.

In verse 18, while he was yet speaking, there came another and said, Job, your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house and behold, a great wind came across the desert, the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house and it fell upon the young people and they are dead and I alone have escaped to tell you.

Strike four. A great wind strikes the house. You can write off the Chaldeans raiding. You can write off the Sabaeans falling as men doing evil deeds but the fire from heaven and the wind from over the wilderness, who controls that but God?

The house collapses. All ten children dead. This is what we call the trauma of speed. There's no time to process. There's no time to grieve the camels before the sheep are gone.

There's no time to grieve the sheep before the children are gone. Satan's fired every torpedo in his arsenal. Instantly, Job loses everything.

[22 : 21] He's been stripped of wealth, of status, of legacy in a moment. And the cosmic courtroom is watching. The Satan is watching.

Will Job curse God? What would you do? What would I do? We've all been there.

We've all suffered. We've seen others. I've tried to console mothers who have lost their children.

But all ten at once?

And everything else as well? Don't you just throw in the towel at this point? Surely Job will curse God. That's the expectation.

But verse 20 tells us a different story. Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshipped.

[23 : 21] Job tears his robe. He shaves his head. These are violent acts of grief. He doesn't fake a smile. He's not all as happy.

He doesn't say praise the Lord for this calamity that's come upon me. No, he's devastated. But he falls on the ground and worships. There's a difference between praise and worship.

There's a difference between praise and worship. Job doesn't dance for joy. but he also doesn't curse God. He worships. And what he says next is actually the theological anchor of this passage of actually the whole book.

He says, naked I came from my mother's womb and naked shall I return. Yahweh has given and Yahweh has taken away. Blessed be the name of Yahweh.

The Lord gave, the Lord take away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. Job blesses the giving and blesses the taking. At this point, the Satan loses the argument.

[24 : 30] Job proves that he loves the giver more than the gifts. He proves his worship is not a business transaction. It's a relationship. And the narrator wants us to know that.

That's why we have verse 22. In all this, Job did not sin or charge God with wrong. Job did what was right. He spoke true of God. And he didn't sin with his mouth.

Job's passed the test. The hedge is gone but his faith remains. But the Satan isn't done. He has one more card to play. And so our scene shifts back to the courtroom.

The inspector general returns and he's not happy. It's interesting actually, these first three verses of chapter 2 are identical to the first three verses of the courtroom in verses 6 through 8.

Now, there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before Yahweh. It's the same exact story. It's like a rerun. So, this gathering happens again and, but what changes is in verse 3, at the end of verse 3, and Yahweh says to Satan again, have you considered my servant Job?

[25 : 50] Well, that's the same thing he said before. 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 for nothing, to destroy him without cause, without reason.

he still holds fast his integrity. Remember this word integrity? That's blameless. It's the same Hebrew root. Blameless integrity.

He still holds fast to his integrity though you incited me to destroy him for nothing without cause.

That's the same word that the Satan uses in his accusation.

Does Job fear God for nothing? You incited me against him for nothing and yes, he does still fear me for nothing. That's what Yahweh's answer to the Satan is.

But the accuser moves the goal post in verse 4 skin for skin. It's like a bartering phrase, this trading idiom. Job is still calculating, okay, I had the price a little bit wrong, but I mean, a man will trade all his camels and maybe even his kids for his own back, for his own skin.

[27 : 13] He's still a mercenary. I just had the cost off a little bit. Make him hurt physically and he will curse you. The contract will break. Well, verse 6, God again accepts the wager, but he gives further instruction.

There's this limit, right? Verse 6, again, Yahweh says to Satan, behold, he's in your hand, only spare his life. Who's holding the leash still? Yahweh is still in control.

So, we move on to this physical assault. Satan wastes no time. He goes out right away and verse 7, goes right from the presence of Yahweh and struck Job with loathsome sores, sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.

Instant striking down a man who's already down. Many have, again, tried to figure out what kind of disease this is that Job has.

That's not the point. It's very clear to Job and his wife that it's from God. God has allowed this. God has allowed this to happen to you.

[28:29] This agonizing, itching, oozing, degrading disease. And so Job takes a shard of pottery and scrapes these pus-filled sacks to let out a little bit of the pain and pressure.

And he sits in the ashes. He's moved from the presidential executive suite to the garbage dump outside of town. And then we have this verse 9 which is a final blow.

It's not from a messenger or a disease. We're not even sure it's incited from the Satan. But it comes from the one person left in his life. In verse 9 his wife says to him, do you still hold fast your integrity?

Curse God and die. She is encouraging him to give in to what Satan expected him to do.

But before we villainize her, we have to remember this woman has just lost her ten children too. She's just lost all her wealth too. And she sees her husband, the one that could comfort her in a state where he can't comfort anyone.

[29:45] And with a disease that in their minds is going to end in his death. Well, just curse God and be done with it. Why are you still being loyal?

This great symbiosis is a lie. I've seen your life. You lived right. Why did God allow this to happen to you? She uses Satan's word, curse God and die.

You know, this is actually, to me, in these two chapters, this is actually the least surprising thing. This is what we would expect. It's what the Satan expected to happen from Job.

It's the natural response to this kind of devastation. But Job refuses. He says, in verse 10, he calls her speech foolish. Not silly foolish, but foolish as in the fool who says there is no God foolish.

And then he asks the question that defines true faith, shall we receive good from God and shall we not receive evil? this is the summit of the narrative.

[30:55] This is the point where Job destroys the theology of the hedge. He destroys the prosperity gospel. He destroys this great symbiosis idea of religion.

He declares that God is not a vending machine. He's the sovereign Lord. He is worthy of worship. He's worthy of worship when he gives blessings, and he is worthy of worship when he sends disaster.

Did you catch that in Job's words here? He says God's the one who sends the evil, sends the disaster. Shall we not accept that from his hand as well?

Satan has lost here. It's interesting, Satan disappears at this point. We don't hear from him again. But the book goes on for several more chapters, many, many more chapters. The silence is about to be broken.

Job has passed the test, but he's sitting in the ashes. He's still in pain, both emotionally and spiritually and physically. And he's going to start coming up with some questions.

[32:04] But we leave him here because this is where our passage ends. I know we get an extra hour today because of the time change, so maybe we'll just go through the whole rest of the book. But maybe I can just tell you this.

In the rest of the book, Job never gets an answer to why suffering, why pain, why do bad things happen to good people. Job never gets the answer to that.

Well, then what's the point? Why do we read this book then? If it doesn't tell us why we have suffering, why we face suffering, why bad things happen to good people, then what's the point of us reading this in Wheaton in 2026?

Because we know we're all going to face pain. I mean, look around the room. The people you love most in this room will either die and cause you much sadness or you will die and cause them much sadness.

That's the reality. Pain and suffering is maybe the only thing more sure than death and taxes. We're going to suffer and if this book doesn't give us the answer to why, then why are we reading it?

[33:12] Why is it here? When the hedge comes down, when the portfolio fails, when a child strays, when the cancer diagnosis comes in, what then?

Will we sound like Job or will we sound more like Job's wife? That's the question. I think often the expression of Christians in trial sounds like they've been betrayed.

We look at God and say, God, I mean, I go to church every week. I tithe regularly. I mean, I even tithe more than I'm supposed to. I serve you faithfully.

I've raised my kids in the best way I could. I pray for them regularly. God, I've kept my end of the bargain. Why aren't you keeping yours?

Well, that's the great symbiosis. That's the point where the Satan is right about us. Oh, you're just a mercenary all along. We don't love the king, just the jewels, just the crown, just the blessings.

[34:28] Job never receives an answer. Job never finds out why he's suffering. He never finds out about the throne room scenes that we know in these first two chapters.

Job never finds out why his ten children had to die. Job demands a day in court.

The only answer he gets is Yahweh says, I'm God. Is that enough? Is it enough that Yahweh says, I am God?

When we face all the evil and suffering in our own lives or in the world around us, is it enough that God says, I'm God? When we face our own personal sadness and trials, the Satan will come and whisper in your ear, if God really loved you, would he let you suffer like this?

And you'll be tempted to believe it. When we see suffering in the world of those around us, of innocent people suffering horribly for no reason, the Satan will whisper in your ears, if God were good, would he allow this pain and suffering?

[36:04] And we'll be tempted to believe it. But here's the thing, every worldview has to wrestle with the reality of pain and suffering, this problem of pain, and every worldview ultimately fails to give any answer to why we suffer.

Secularism says it's just biological chance. That's no answer to someone who's suffering. Blind chance is why. Other religions will attribute it to karma, something you've done in your life has brought this upon you, or something you've done in your past life that you don't even know about has brought this upon you.

Christianity is the only worldview that offers any sort of comfort to the human heart in suffering. But it isn't some neat equation.

It's a relationship. It's a relationship. The Christian gospel offers a Savior who has said, I will never leave you or forsake you. The Christian gospel offers an indwelling Holy Spirit who grants us the peace of God that surpasses understanding.

The Christian gospel gives us this firm promise that the suffering of this present age is nothing worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed. The Christian gospel gives us the Savior who says, Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

[37:44] So, what hope can we cling to when we're in despair? What hope can we point others to in their darkest hour? The Satan will tell you there is none. But don't believe it.

The good news of the gospel is that Job is not the Savior. The Savior was another suffering servant who would come centuries later.

Job was the greatest man in the East. Jesus is the King of Glory. Job lost his hedge involuntarily. Jesus willingly gave up the glory of heaven to enter our brokenness.

Job offered sacrifices for his children. Jesus became the sacrifice for his enemies. Job sat in ashes outside of the town. Jesus hung on a cross outside the city.

Job said, the Lord gives, the Lord takes away. Jesus said, Eloi, Eloi, lemma sabachthani, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And at that point, we can imagine the Satan looking at the cross and thinking, oh, I won.

[38:49] I won. He's going to curse God. But no, what does Jesus say? He says these words that, in my mind, echo, blessed be the name of the Lord. Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

Jesus is the ultimate answer to Satan's accusation. He's the one that gives us the reason we can face suffering. God is the Because he entered into it with us.

He can empathize, he can sympathize with us in our weaknesses. He drank the dregs of pain and death so that death and pain would be reversed and he would wipe away every tear. That's the hope we have in the gospel of Christ.

God is not some clockwinder who wound up the world and let it run its course. No, he entered in. He sacrificed his own son. That he would relate to our suffering and that his son would bring us into relationship with him.

My encouragement for each of us this morning, put your faith in the greater Job, the one who sat in the ashes for you, the one who loved you for nothing.

[40:02] Because then in the wreckage of that day, your deepest sorrow, you'll be able to say he is worthy, blessed be the name of the Lord. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we know that you are the giver of every good and perfect gift. You're the owner of all we have. God, we're the God. But our hearts are often tempted to love your blessings more than you, to grow comfortable behind the hedges of safety and health and provision, and to tremble more at the thought of them failing than of losing a relationship with you.

I pray that our desire would be to love you more each day, to point others to the great love and peace and hope offered in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whose name we pray.

Amen.