

Mr Doug Horchak

Sermon Transcript

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The Lesson of Job

Today I want to talk about a famous servant of God, and I want to primarily refer to a book in the Bible that has probably proven to a lot of people to be a bit of an enigma because there are a lot of people who probably don't read this book for a tremendous amount of inspiration, at least, on a regular basis. The book that I am referring to is one of the longest books in the Bible. It is larger than most. It has 40 chapters to it. And yet, I think it is one of the most seldom read books by a lot of people. I would like you to turn to the book of Job, if you wouldn't mind.

If I were to ask all of you what is the purpose and the message of the book of Job...now, I'm not asking you to blurt out here during services, but if I asked you the question, what's the purpose and the message of the book of Job, how would you respond to that? I think it's true that we should strive as God's people to understand the purpose and the message of all the books of the Bible. This being a quite lengthy one—and quite a unique one, I may add—we should all be able to understand and respond to such a question.

Many scholars and would-be scholars say that the book of Job is excellent literature. Some of you may have taken courses in either high school or college in which the book of Job and some books of the Bible were actually presented as books of literature. The book of Job is considered in its literary style to be an excellent example of literature out of the Bible; and, again, there are some secular courses that will even underscore that. But I think most people in the Church would probably say, "Well, the book of Job is the story about a self-righteous man." Many of you have probably concluded that or heard sermonettes or sermons about it, and I surely wouldn't deny that that element is maybe part of the picture of what Job dealt with. But, you know, it's interesting, when you read through the book of Job, you don't find the subject, at least in the term of "self-righteousness," directly addressed at all. And I've always had a feeling that there is more to it than just some of the difficulties Job himself may have dealt with. As a matter of fact, when you read the beginning of the book of Job, which we'll get to in a few moments, it starts off with God, the Creator of heaven and earth, explaining the righteousness of Job, in this particular instance, to Satan the devil. So I think a person could extrapolate that the shortfall that Job may have had—

and I think there's indication that may have been part of the picture—was surely not the primary focus of why this whole account of Job and the incredible trial that this man suffered, was recorded. There's probably more to it.

There is another question that people often ask, and that is, why do the innocent suffer? Of course, we have written about that subject in the Church over the years because we live in a world where there is a tremendous amount of suffering. I think that what we have witnessed in the news over the last several months over in Afghanistan (and I'm not talking about the results of the allied forces being there so much as just what that country and some of the people within it have caused and inflicted upon themselves), we in this country often look through the glasses of Americans and wonder why it is that so many people suffer such horrible fates and existence in the world. Sometimes people refer back to this account of Job to strive to address that question of why God might allow the innocent to suffer. Yet, when you read through the book of Job, I believe that there's another deeper spiritual lesson that we can get from this particular account. I think that the lesson that we can get from the book of Job is incredibly vital for all people who understand the plan of God. Hopefully, by the time we finish the sermon today, you will understand maybe a little bit better why I make that statement, why it is that somebody who is converted and who understands the plan of God as we do would gain something even greater from the book of Job than just the man's response to the incredible suffering that he went through, because I think the real lesson of Job is one of the most important messages and lessons that can aid us in anchoring our lives to our calling. There's no doubt about the fact that with what Job suffered, that man had to have an anchor in something that at least kept him as stable as he was. He didn't live a perfect life, and he didn't live through the trial that he went through without having some amount of wavering toward the end. But in spite of all of that, I think all of us would agree that the patriarch Job did have an anchor in something that kept him from throwing away what he understood and really cursing God in the end to His face.

Unlike many of the books of the Bible, the information in Job, the lesson of Job, goes beyond just the issue of doctrine. There aren't too many things that you can prove out of the book of Job that relate to the fundamental doctrines of the Church. I mean, clearly Job, toward the latter part of this account, acknowledged that he would wait until his change comes (I think that's in Job 38), so we know that you can prove some things about Job's understanding about the resurrection; but primarily you don't find a lot of people referring to the book of Job to prove the fundamental doctrines of the Church. And yet, God chose to have this incredible example of suffering recorded for His people. It does record a very important lesson about the plan of God, and it does show us as well that God's way works. That God's way works! As we'll find out in reading through the book of Job, it demonstrates to God's people, as well as to Satan the devil, that against all odds and against Satan's many efforts to destroy and to virtually snuff

out the work and the Church of God, that God will succeed in His plan of salvation for mankind. It really is a tremendously encouraging message in that regard when you read through the book of Job in the context I believe that God intended us to understand it.

First, I would like to consider a unique personage in this whole account, and that is that of Satan the devil. This is one of the few places in the Bible where Satan plays a great role in God's dealings with one of His servants, a very functional role in terms of conversation. I think all of us know that Satan factors in both to the beginning of the account of Job as well as to the end of this particular account. I think we can see, if you read through the book of Job, that the part that Satan plays in this is really woven right alongside of God's part in communicating with Job, because the very beginning of this account, as we'll read in Job, the first chapter, is the challenge that Satan makes to God that really introduces this particular story, a true story of a servant of God.

How could Lucifer or Satan be so close to the government of God, which we know was true, as he was called Lucifer or "Light Bringer," and still, in the end, rebel against God? That's one of the great questions of Christianity and theology. I think God has led His Church to understand that there is a reason why. It may not be a reason that is a good reason, of course, but, nonetheless, one that really speaks to one of the reasons why we as people who are converted sometimes can find ourselves getting challenged to remain loyal to our calling, can find ourselves distracted to others things, and to sometimes even wonder if God is on our side or not.

Satan, of course, was created as Lucifer and as one that was a servant of God, a spiritual servant of God, one of what we believe to be three archangels of God. Now, when you think about it, it really stuns us to consider what he did because we know that as far as Christianity is concerned, we've always believed that faith and obedience are necessary for salvation, and one without the other is not going to gain us salvation. We can't earn our salvation through obedience to the law of God. On the other hand, if we just have faith and we are ignorant and really choose to be ignorant of obedience to God, then that is not going to result in salvation being experienced by an individual. I think it's pretty clear that, in one sense, Satan had the same elements that he had to deal with when he was created as Lucifer and was one of the anointed cherubs that probably covered the throne of God...clearly at one point in time, Satan had to stop obeying God. (We're talking about the history of God's created order, the spiritual created order.) But at some point, he also stopped believing. He stopped believing in the role and the power and the omniscience and the omnipotence of the One that created him.

Lucifer became conscious in time as he watched and he saw God create much of the universe—and he, of course, did not see God bring things into existence from

nothing because he was created. In other words, he was not a third party that watched God create everything else, but he had to believe that God was the one who did it. We often, of course, are concerned about our proving the existence of God, as well we should. We have a couple of excellent booklets on the subject that we have published in the Church. Of course, the apostle Paul in **Romans, chapter 1, verse 20**, basically stated to the Church that we live in a world that is truly without excuse of concluding that there is no God because of the created order, the universe that we have to prove that. But what about Lucifer? We don't often consider, well, what proof did he have? Well, he, in one sense, was a step closer to the creation of the universe in terms of witnessing it.

In **Isaiah**, the **14th chapter**, if you'll turn there, we read an account here of what Lucifer was thinking at that period of time when he digressed from the way of God and from his role in the family of God, as it were, or in the government of God. **Isaiah 14 and verse 13**:

Isa. 14:13-14 , *"For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven,"* Lucifer said, *"I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I,"* Lucifer said, *"will be like the most High."*

You see, there was a point where Satan felt he was equal with God, that, in a sense, "I'm as good as You are, and I deserve to be on that throne." Now, if Lucifer believed in the total creative powers of God, if he fully understood that at the time, then what would possess him to take such a bold step as we find recorded here in **Isaiah 14**? But clearly there was a point in time in which his faith in the role and the power and the omniscience of God began to be eroded in some way, which enabled him to make some other choices. And really, the variable in terms of the choices Satan the devil made—Lucifer, the one who became Apollyon or the destroyer—is the same fundamental element that allows us as human beings to make choices, and that is free moral agency. Free moral agency. Every one of us in this room makes choices every day. I had to make a pretty hard choice before church services, and that was whether or not to have a cup of coffee before church. I like coffee, but coffee goes through me, and I had more than enough coffee this morning. It was wonderful and I'm awake. I think I'll stay that way for the next hour. But you know, we make choices. Some of them are pretty mundane choices. There are other choices that are more fundamental to our existence, more fundamental to our calling, and I think you know what I'm talking about.

There was a point where Satan felt equal with God. He virtually said, "I'm as good as you are." We as human beings have to make choices in our Christian lives as to whether or not we are going to do right or wrong. We know what happened to Lucifer. Now, that being said, let's go to the book of **Job**, the first chapter, **Job, chapter 1**. Lest any of you begin wondering and look at your watch, you know,

we've got 40 chapters to get through here in the next 45 minutes. I'm not going to read this word-for-word. I am going to focus on a few verses, several of them, really, throughout the sermon.

Let's notice in **verse 6** of Job, chapter 1, it really begins the real story.

Job 1:6 , *Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them.*

In the recording of this event, it seems to just casually mention that Satan was amongst the sons of God. Likely we are talking about the righteous angels of God coming to report to Him at the throne of God, and Satan came among them. There was a gathering and Satan was there. Now, this seems to be somewhat atypical of what we commonly presume is happening around the throne of God. We find the throne of God described in different places in the Bible, and usually Satan's presence is not one of the things that's used. And yet, we find here on this particular occasion that Satan was amongst the other sons or servants of God. Now, God probably knew what Satan was going to ask; and God, of course, beat him to the punch and asked him the question, "Where did you come from?" And in **verse 7**: *And the Lord said to Satan, "From where do you come?" So Satan answered the Lord and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it."*

Satan, of course, was referring to the fact that he was taking care of normal business as he saw it on the earth. I'm not going to get into a discussion as to our understanding and belief that Satan is not only the prince of the power of the air but the one who, at this point in time, God has allowed to have a certain amount of control over the doings on planet earth. And that's true. I think we can scripturally prove that. He responded and said, basically, "I'm taking care of what I have been taking care of for a long time." And then in **verse 8**: *Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, and notice what he said about Job: that there is none like him on the earth...He didn't just ask him to compare, just to look at Job, but He made the qualifying statement that this man is unique. I would say that's hardly a criticism of Job...that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns, or eschews evil?"*

That's a very positive description of Job's righteousness, at least as God described it to Satan. I could only hope that God would describe me anywhere near that way, and I'm surely not claiming that He would. Now, I'm not in any way implying that Job had no problems and that he did not suffer from some element of self-righteousness at the end in the account of God dealing with him and his dealing with a tremendous trial. But clearly from the beginning, God was setting Job up as an example of a righteous person, a servant of God, and from all indications, a converted individual.

As we go through this account, I would like you to take Satan's view of this servant of God and, almost like a template, put it over the way that Satan may look at the Church of God as a whole, because, for all we know, Job may have been one of just a handful of people on earth at that time that were truly serving God; and from what God says here, was, if not THE best, one of the best representatives of the servants of God. Now, today we believe that there are many more than that. I don't know that we know exactly how many people are really converted. That's surely not for us to know, but I'd like you to consider as we read through this, and as Satan challenges God on the reasons why Job served Him, to really consider that in terms of the Church as a whole, and even, maybe, what we've been through the last eight years or so.

Verses 9-11 , *So Satan answered the Lord and said, "Does Job fear God for nothing?" It's a very fundamental question in all of this, and notice what he says: "Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land." But Satan said, "But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!"*

Putting it in other terms, Satan was making the point, "Look, You give the man everything he wants. You've taken care of him. He really has need of nothing. You take that away, and we'll see just how much of a servant he really is, just how convicted he is about the truth of God, as opposed to the cushy environment that maybe he exists in." I'm taking a bit of editorial license, I acknowledge that; but I am trying to put it into words, brethren, that we can relate to as individuals today. This was not a one-time event. This was a one-time instance that God caused this kind of thing to be recorded in detail, but I believe that you can show out of the Bible that this is not a one-time event, that He allowed Satan to have access to the throne of God. Anything that Satan does, God has to allow, particularly this case. Now, Satan, of course, in his own way, was striving to throw into God's face that Job was not serving God because of a deep, internalized conviction about God, His law, His plan, and Job's calling. He clearly was trying to say, "Look! It's a sham. It's a very thin veneer. He only is perceived to obey you because of what you physically do to take care of him." He used the terminology of having built a hedge about him. Satan, in a sense, was challenging the reason that Job served and worshiped God.

Now, if you look at this from a broader perspective—not just Satan challenging God about one person, but as I said earlier, the way that Satan may view all of the servants of God, which, ultimately, entails a fundamental aspect of the whole plan of God, that Satan was challenging the very plan of God. The ability of God to change a corruptible, carnal human being to someone who, through free moral agency and through a calling, responding to that calling from God, could choose to love and to serve God regardless of any physical gain or aspects in this life. I

mean, is that not, in so many words, what the work of God and what the plan of God is all based upon? If no one ever chose, even after having been invited or called by God, to respond positively, then would the plan of God, at least as we know it, ever come to fruition? Well, it wouldn't. It would not.

Now, why would Satan make such a presumption? I want you to try to think about this from the point of view of why any human being would make an assumption like this. Why would he think that this was necessarily true of Job, and what was he really trying to accomplish here? When you think back at the experience that Satan had up to this point in time—we don't know the exact date that Job lived, but we believe, based upon the nature of this book, that it was quite a while back and obviously predated Abraham. But, in any event, what experience did Satan have previous to Job in dealing with this basic issue of why people would obey God or their vulnerability to turning their back on God? All you have to do is go back to Genesis 1, 2, and 3, and the most primary example of Satan actually, in a sense, challenging—and I think we could say, somewhat successfully—individuals that were created for a particular purpose: Adam and Eve. God gave them what? Free moral agency, to make a choice, and what happened? Based upon what we know happened in Genesis, chapters 2 and 3, at least up to that point, Satan successfully enticed Eve and then ultimately Adam to disobey God, and *{he was able to do that}* when they had the potential for salvation at their fingertips. Now, we can look at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life as mere metaphors or symbols, and yet I think all of us know that we do believe that those were literal trees; but they were symbolic of something far greater.

Satan witnessed that God created Adam and Eve. I think that Satan realized that he was able to turn the head of Eve and of Adam; and in a matter of time, in a matter of years, several hundred years, things go bad on this earth. What do we find in the first several chapters of Genesis? God got to the point where He said, "It concerns Me that I even created man," given what He saw. Now, it's not that God changed His mind about His plan, but what God saw happening on earth at the time of Noah was so horrible and so horrific that He felt the need to allow mankind, except for the family of Noah, to be destroyed.

Have any of you ever watched other people and analyzed what you thought might be going through their heads? Of course we have. Sometimes we do that to our own detriment because if that bubbles over into judging other people or thinking we know exactly what they're feeling, then we can run into some real problems; but it really is part of the human condition, is it not, for us to...we see...maybe it's with our children or maybe you as an adult child might do that with your own parents or with neighbors or friends. You sometimes will analyze why people do things. Not that that's always wrong. Sometimes we're wrong and sometimes, you know, history proves out that we might be right as to why we thought somebody made a decision. Now, don't you think that Satan is no

different, that he probably watched with great interest what was happening on earth and was, no doubt, in the middle of the murder and the mayhem that was taking place on earth prior to the flood. I mean, he caused it. I'm not saying that people were not responsible. He was involved in that, and I'm sure, no doubt, watched with great interest what he saw was God's response to it, and that is, "I'm going to wipe them all out." Now, God's reason for doing that, given God's ability to resurrect and all the other things that we know about God as our Father, the Creator, might have not been focused on by Satan the devil; but he saw something take place. And I believe, based upon history as you look at that, that he felt that he began to see a weak point in the plan of God. He analyzed what He saw to be God working with His created order, which was human beings, and His servants and then many multiple, probably thousands if not hundreds of thousands that ultimately were destroyed in the flood. And yet, there were only a few righteous people, Noah being the chiefest amongst them, and {God} saved those people and again, started...maybe not started over, but surely with mankind, but did just that. And so, I think when he came to God's throne in the account in the first chapter of Job, he believed that he had the capability of making his point.

And yet, we know that as people serve God, God has blessed them. That's one of the great, wonderful promises of God's plan, that when we serve Him, He will take care of us. He may not always take care of us in the exact way that we think and we hope, but ultimately He will. I mean, if the last several years haven't proven that to us, that things don't always unfold in the way that we might presume that they would, but we can look back in hindsight and, despite our humanity and our shortcomings, that if we're yielding to God, that God will take care of His people. Even in the book of **Malachi**, in **chapter 3**...we believe, of course, that this is a prophecy about the people of God, in Malachi 3, and **verse 16**, where God, through the prophet Malachi, said:

Mal 3:16 , *Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, (you probably remember this account), and the Lord listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on His name.*

Verse 17 of Malachi 3: *"They shall be Mine," says the Lord of hosts, "On the day that I make them My jewels." And He said, "And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him."*

This is just one of a number of accounts in the Bible where God admits that He will intervene, that He will put a hedge about, or He will spare those that serve Him. Spare them from what? Well, the whole context of Malachi, chapters 3 and 4, is the day of the Lord; and if we understand this correctly, this is probably referring to the time when God's wrath is going to be poured out upon this earth and when God will choose to spare at least some of His people that serve Him.

We read in the book of Revelation that some may be martyred for what they believe in. The point is this, that God does intervene in one way or another and spare and bless and protect and take care of those that, by way of life and choice, serve God. Job was no different. Satan, of course, was trying to exacerbate that and to make something out of it that, in time, proved was not true. And yet, is it not the case that until you strip away all the benefits, you don't really know why people do what they do? Has not life taught that to a lot of us about ourselves. Maybe what we learned about ourselves was not always that complimentary; but if God in His mercy allows us to learn those lessons in a finite physical way, hopefully, we can overcome those shortcomings and the weaknesses that we have so that when we're dealing with eternal life, we can show God and really be able to understand about ourselves that our commitment is eternal and it's not based upon perks, even though God does promise protection.

In some ways, I believe that Satan felt that he succeeded to some degree with Adam and Eve and he, of course, would like to destroy Job. Now, if the account here in the first chapter of Job really reflects that fact that this was the best example at the time (if that's what we read here) of a servant of God that served God and eschewed evil and unrighteousness, and if Satan could cause that individual to crack, then could he not conclude and maybe in the face of all of the righteous angels that were witnessing this conversation...we don't normally think of it that way, but I want you to think about it as you would human beings. If somebody comes and challenges your leader and says, "You can't lead the way that you say that you can, and these people here don't really serve you and follow you because of a deep commitment in principle of what you believe and teach, but it's because of what you give them," and you pick the strongest amongst them and you challenge him, and if the strongest amongst them fails that test, would it not begin to affect the thinking of the others that served that great leader, in this particular case, God? I guess, what I'm saying is that the righteous angels that witnessed this, we find in Job, chapter 1, they were still free moral agents. They still could be swayed, although I think history has proven that those angels, their character, as we have come to call it, now is set, at least to the degree that we can understand that in a spiritual realm. Satan was clearly trying to accomplish something here that went beyond just making for a good story in the Bible. He was striving, as we find in most cases, to destroy the work of God.

Was Satan not accusing Job? Don't you think that you could safely say that Satan was accusing Job of basically having a flimsy commitment to God? That's really what he did. Now, do you know of any other place in the Bible where Satan is also called the accuser of the brethren? In **Revelation, chapter 12**, we know that that particular account actually defines Satan as the "accuser of the brethren." It's not just the accuser of Job, but the accuser of the "brethren," plural; and the time setting of Revelation 12, while historically goes back to the very time that a third of the stars of heaven fell, which we know goes way back, but it

comes up to the present at the end of chapter 12. So, if he is presently, past and present, and no doubt, future, the accuser of the brethren, then I contend that there is a very distinct possibility that this account in Job, chapter 1, has happened many, many times and in many different ways, and the very accusation that was made about Job, in one way or another, has, no doubt, been made about, either individually or collectively, the people of God for millennia. But we wonder, how was he the accuser of the brethren? The account of Job explains how, and I believe it reveals why: by an effort to destroy the commitment of the servants of God, not only on a physical plane but even those spiritual servants of God.

Now, back to **Job, chapter 1, verse 10**. Notice what he said:

Job 1:10-12 , *"Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!" And the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power"...*now, permission was granted at this point in time, it seems, for Satan to be able to do some things up to a point...*"only do not lay a hand on his person."* So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.

At one moment here in the life of Job, he seemed to have it all; and, of course, the next moment, his wealth, his home, and ultimately his family were taken from him and destroyed. I would say this is probably the ultimate turn of events for a person. Now, I think we all have in our lives certain turns of events; and some people, depending on where you are in life, have had events turn quicker than others. For some people, getting a year older is a big turn of events. You know, I'm going to be flipping over the 5 - 0 here in a matter of a few months. Well, it's kind of a deal, not that big a deal, really, to me, but, you know, I mean, these things can become a big deal, even just getting a year older. But I'm talking about life-changing events, unplanned events in peoples' lives. Is there anybody in this audience that has had some unplanned events take place in their life in the last year, two, three, five, maybe? I think we all have. I think we all have. Now, of course, we find right here the example to the extreme in the case of Job.

Verses 13-19 , *And there was a day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house. And there came a messenger unto Job, and said, "The oxen were plowing, and the asses feeding beside them: and the Sabeans fell upon them, and took them away; they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell you."* And, of course, if that wasn't bad enough, **verse 16**, *While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, "The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and has burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell you."* While he was yet speaking, there came

also another, and said, "The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have carried them away, yes, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell you." While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, "Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house: and, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell you."

Now, I have to believe that reading these few verses does not come close to capturing not only the emotion but the disbelief and grief that that man had to feel. And I want you to consider that in light of how he was perceived by God, how he was perceived in one sense, on the other side of the equation by Satan, and probably how others around him perceived Job and his family, their substance, their wealth, as well as his being a servant of God. And, of course, all of this by Satan was designed to inflict a wound that would destroy the man on a spiritual plane. Satan, of course, always wants to destroy. That is why he is called "the destroyer." He tried to destroy Job, but was he really trying to destroy Job here? What was the one exception that God gave to this whole allowance? He said, "You can't destroy the man, physically." I think Satan's experience up to that point in time meant that he probably realized that wasn't going to happen, so he couldn't do that. But what was it that he was trying to destroy? His reputation? Well, that might change and clearly did with his friends, as you read through the story. Is it not true that toward the end that some of his friends began to say, "Well, you know, you must just be a bad guy." And they began to turn on him. Well, his reputation did change, but was that all Satan was trying to do? What was he trying to destroy? Think about it. Is it not something that we call a spiritual commitment? He was trying to find a weak link, or as it were, a chink in that man's armor and to get him to succumb and to relent and to curse God to His face and to turn around and walk away, this man who was the most righteous man on the earth, at least as much as we can glean from chapter 1, who served God and eschewed evil.

Of course, Satan has been trying to do that with the people of God, with the work of God, in whatever form that has taken through the years ever since. We have been warned about this being a part of what we have to face and battle as the people of God now and then, ever since you and I were called into the Church, for most of us, decades and decades ago. But, you know, things can get going along kind of comfortably. I'm not saying life's been comfortable for everybody, you know, twenty-thirty years ago; but relatively speaking, in the world and in the Church, things can kind of just lump along and everything's going OK. We can begin to maybe lose sight of the fact that we serve a God that created this universe; and yet God has allowed, and underscore that word "allowed," Satan, the one who was Lucifer, who used to serve God and no longer does, temporal power to some degree over this earth and that his main goal is to destroy the

work of God. And he understands, as you read in the book of **James**, that part of that plan is the meaning of the Day of Atonement. He understands that. Satan is not clueless to the plan of God. If you gave him a quiz like we might do in Sabbath School to our kids, I think he'd get 100 percent on "What does the Church of God say the holy days mean?" I think Satan would get 100 percent on that, if that's all he responded to. He's not ignorant of that.

Job 1:20-22 , *Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, and said, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly, at this point in time.*

Now, we know that Job was a human being. He wasn't perfect; and God, of course, was showing Satan something about Job. Notice in **verse 1, chapter 2**, now:

Job 2:1-3 , *Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them to present himself again before the Lord. And the Lord said unto Satan, "Where did you come from?" And Satan answered the Lord, and said, "From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it." And the Lord said unto Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that fears God, and eschews evil? And still he holds fast his integrity, although you moved Me against him, to destroy him without cause." Again, God was showing that at least up to this point, His servant did not crumble under the tremendous pressure of the hand of Satan to destroy that man—not his life, but his commitment to his calling.*

Verses 4-5 , *How did Satan respond? And Satan answered the Lord, and said, "Skin for skin, yes, all that a man has will he give for his life. But put forth your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and then he will curse You to Your face."*

Satan understood something about human beings. On the way up here from Texas, coming up to camp yesterday, my daughter and I were...you know, you pass the time by listening to the radio. These days, that can be almost anything, kind of dangerous sometimes, but we were listening to the news just before getting up here to the Beloit area; and, of course, there was a debate on National Public Radio as to what measures the U. S. military should take over in Afghanistan with some of the prisoners. You know, the Taliban that have been taken prisoner, several thousand of them. Of course, the issue of whether or not to use techniques of torture to get people to recant as well as to tell about, in this particular instance, where the other al Qaeda leaders are and where Osama bin Laden might be. There was this debate on the morality of that or not. But it does

say something, though, about what we human beings have discovered in the last six thousand years, and that is what Satan just told God, is true. You start torturing someone physically, and you can usually get him to talk. So this was not a hollow accusation or a hollow statement by Satan. He understood something that even human beings have perpetrated on each other to get them to talk or to recant or whatever the case might be, and that's really what he was talking about , torture. Now, you begin comparing that to, maybe, what you and I might have gone through up to this point in time since we've been called, and it really pales most of our experiences into insignificance, up till now anyway.

So, now, it's that Job obeyed God just to save his own skin. This is what the accusation was. He tried to earn his salvation, his physical salvation. Have you ever heard of that accusation before? Now, it is true that some people might have, even *{by}* obedience to God, tried to earn their salvation. The scripture indicates that you can't do that. How can the GIFT, underline "gift," in all caps...how can you earn a gift? You can't. **Romans 6:23** says that the gift of God is eternal life, not what you earn. What we've all earned, brethren, is death. As I've tried to tell myself over the years, anything short of death is a perk. Now, that's kind of, maybe, a negative way of looking at it; but I'll tell you, while that may not be the way that God would want us to state it, it's helped to remind me now and then that a lot of the things that I think I deserve...and, you know, you may think, "What do I deserve?" Well, you may not even think about it in those terms, but when you realize it, look, we all deserve to die. I can't be concerned about other peoples' innocence or guilt before God. I just have to know that I don't deserve to live forever, that I deserve to die; and because of God's great plan, which is really what was at stake here, we can live for all eternity. Satan was trying to destroy the best example of that at the time.

From what we see in the plan of God, Jesus Christ started the first (which was the first) truly group-organized effort of God working with a large group, called the spiritual congregation, the Israel of God, as Paul referred to it in the book of **Galatians**. And Christ said that the gates of hades or hell would never prevail against the Church, that it would always exist. Now, how did He know that? Well, He's the Son of God, that's true. But I have to believe that even the account of Job and what almost happened—what could have happened but what didn't happen to Job—and what God knew in His omniscience and omnipotence...there was no reference to numbers in **Matthew 16:18**, but that the gates of hell, in other words, death, would never prevail against the Church. It would always exist, to a greater or lesser degree, in terms of numbers.

In **verses 7-8 of Job 2**: *So went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes.*

There are some scholars that say that he was booted out of town and that the only place that he could find to live was in the dump. There are others that say that, well, there's no indication that that was necessarily true, but that for Job, that was the most comfortable place he could be—away from people, away from other things that would get in the way of an individual that was suffering in a way that probably only a few people have ever come to understand. We know that Job had three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, and, you know, you read through the account of their effort to...I mean, it was good that he had friends. I'm sure it was encouraging when those friends came to him; but as time went on, the advice of some of those friends did not prove to be helpful to him. They concluded some things about Job that in the end weren't necessarily true. There was the suggestion by one of his friends that "the reason you're going through this is because you've blown it!" Now, you look back at the beginning of the account, and that's really not the way this all started. It started because the accuser of the brethren was given—given, allowed—an opportunity to go so far in seeing whether or not this example of a servant of God was going to throw in the towel of his commitment and calling if Satan touched what he had, including his own health. And Satan, of course, pulled out all stops in getting Job to reject that. Every indication is in the account of Job that Satan worked on him for months and months.

I'm going to bring this back to where we are today in the Church. My experience in the Church of God only spans about 36 years or so, 36-37 years; and some of you have considerably longer than that, and others, somewhat shorter. Of course, I only view things through what I've experienced, too. God gives us examples like this account of Job of a servant of His; and everything we read, I believe, indicates that Job was an individual who understood the plan of God. He understood, as you read the latter part of the book of Job, that he would wait after he died until his "change" came. We often will read through that amongst other scriptures at funerals, preaching the truth of the resurrection; and we'll quote from the very mouth of Job, as it were, to help people understand that this is not new. Those who truly were servants of God understood that there was a plan and a reason for humans to be put on this earth. And if this was an example of Satan accusing a brother in the faith, which I believe it is, then what about Satan's attempt to accuse the brethren from that point in time on, and even the accusations that might have arisen since God has called you and me into the Church, in his effort to destroy the faith and the commitment of the people of God?

Well, I believe, in some ways, nothing's new, nothing's changed. His effort is still to destroy. There is no guarantee that once you were baptized and put under water and hands were laid on you and me and we received the Spirit of God, there is no guarantee that you are not going to leave your calling. There's nothing in the Bible that says, you know, "Once you're saved, once you're converted, you've got it made." There are people who believe that, but there's nothing in the

Bible that indicates that. On the other hand, I don't think God wants us as His people to walk around in fear after we're baptized and become a spiritual paranoid and every day in our life, you know...but if we become so self-confident, then that can become a bit of a problem. I believe that salvation, once we're converted, in the eyes of God, is ours to lose, if we make choices that result in that. But, in that sense, it's still ours if we don't let go, which is exactly what Satan was trying to get Job to do, to let go, to recant, to curse the very God that created him and called him, to say it's not worth it. "This whole idea about God and Jesus Christ and the plan is a sham anyway. All it's brought me is grief in my life." Have you ever thought that? What do you think Job might have thought? I mean, we know because we see this side of the story that in actual fact, his suffering was because he was a servant of God. That's the way I read Job's account. Don't you? It wasn't just a random, "eenie, meanie, minie, mo." No. This was a selected target, with little (to put it in military terms) collateral damage, other than his immediate family.

Now, at the end of the book of Job, when God begins to speak, He talks about how He created this whole universe—some of the most amazing words of God about the way that He created the universe and how the sons of God were around when He created it. Not only did Job hear this, not only do we read it for our edification—you know what I'm talking about, the latter chapters of the book of Job, where God speaks and He talks about the animals that He created, and some that probably don't exist today, huge ones—who else was listening? Now, we know that Job was and we know that, as we read through this, God caused it to be recorded for our edification, but who else was listening? Who was a principal party in this whole account back in Job, chapter 1? Well, Satan was listening. There was something He was showing him as well.

God puts all things into perspective, as God always does. And, in a sense, He went back to creation in responding to Job about what he was going through and some of the questions, the open-ended questions that Job was asking. Was Job weakening? Well, I have no doubt that the man was in a weakened state, not just physically, but, to some degree, had questions. But as someone told me many, many years ago, having questions is part of learning. But God starts in His account in the latter chapters of Job with creation, with the two trees of Genesis, as it were, and He gives context to what He allows to happen to His work and to His people. So, Job basically acknowledges at the end, in Job, he said, "Now my eye sees."

Job learned something through all of this. I don't know that the only thing that Job learned was the importance of seeing himself as small as he really was. There may have been some righteousness that was self-instilled within him because of his own humanity. I have no doubt that was probably there, but what did his eyes see that he acknowledged in the latter two chapters of the book of Job? Might it not be the same lesson that we're trying to learn today about the permanency of

God's commitment and His plan, that there is a hedge that God places around mankind? I mean, really, when you read the Bible, the account of the Bible, there's a hedge that God has placed around all of mankind. Because, otherwise, Satan would probably have destroyed us a long time ago. And, of course, in particular, there is a hedge that God has placed around those that serve Him. It's maybe a metaphor, a hedge. To us today in America, a hedge is just a bunch of bushes that are cut kind of nice, that are kind of in lieu of a fence. It doesn't really keep a lot out, other than maybe your neighbor's looking in on your barbecue or something. I know in the back yard of the Nutzman's, they have these beautiful trees. Some of you have probably been over. They have these trees in the back yard, you know. Where we've moved to in north Dallas, we have a yard that's not a whole lot bigger than half this stage; and we don't even have a tree back there, so I looked back at the Nutzman's this morning when I got up and saw beautiful trees. It's kind o g...well, it must go up thirty feet. It's not really a hedge. It's beyond that.

Now, this is really a manner of saying that God does protect and shelter His people. Otherwise, again, Satan would have destroyed all of mankind, and in particular, those who have served God a long time ago. Now, there's a lesson. There's a sense at this point in time, at the end of the book of Job, that Satan was forced to acknowledge, really, the greatest truth of all time. Now, he's not given up since then, but God through circumstance showed something and proved something, that God can—now, these may seem like obvious things to us as we sit here—but that God can and will save mankind. Maybe not every last person, because choice is involved. That's the great lesson from this account, but God will do it.

There is a plan that God has for that salvation; and with God's plan and with His Holy Spirit, which becomes a part of the life of those who respond to that calling, and God's program and plan of working with carnal, frail human flesh, with God's mind inside of a person who is nothing more than a piece—as Job was, in his latter days before being healed—a piece of human trash...that was where he was living. There are some very sordid descriptions of what this man probably went through; but God can, with that hunk of flesh, in concert with His Holy Spirit, stripped of everything (which Job, of course, became), He can cause that individual through choice to prevail against the combined forces of evil in this universe and Satan's effort to destroy God's plan to expand His family.

When you think about it, in the book of Job in this account, what was at stake was everything. It was everything. It's really one of the greatest lessons of all time. And one that has repeated itself, I believe, in one way or another more than once since then. Probably hundreds, if not thousands of times, there have been efforts to destroy. When you look at the account with Jesus Christ, after He had fasted, Satan's effort to destroy Him then...so there were individual times and I think collectively, even with the people of God, when Satan has tried to do that, to

scatter the people of God, to get us to either individually or collectively—maybe not through the destruction of every physical thing that you or I have, maybe not through the allowance of causing you or me to be stricken down with the most hideous disease a human being has ever suffered and lived through, maybe not that way, but nonetheless, an effort to get us to fundamentally give up the same thing, and that is our calling and destroy the faith and the unity in what Jesus Christ called His body, the Church of God.

Brethren, as we forge ahead, as indeed we should and must as God's people and as His Church, as we, metaphorically speaking, mend our nets to continue to finish the great work of God, and as we individually face, which indeed we will, and collectively, the immediate future of what's happening in the world we live in—it's a very sobering time that we're living through—and realize the preparations that we as God's people must make for the return of Jesus Christ, let's not forget the lesson of Job: that God will not give up on any of us IF we continue to serve Him and that God's Church and His Holy Spirit and the work that will announce His plan of salvation for all of mankind, in the end, will prevail.