

The Enemy at Work

Job 1:6—2:10

[District Pastoral Conference; Rochester, MN; May 2, 2000]

by: John C. Jeske

There are a number of reasons why a study of the book of Job deserves a place on the agenda of a pastoral conference. For one, the book treats *the problem of suffering*, a problem that has plagued the human race for a long time, including every person in this room, and which our Lord has told us will continue to cause trouble for people until he returns in glory.

More specifically, the book of Job addresses *the suffering of the God-fearing*. Job repeatedly asked the question: “Why?”—a question you more than once have heard suffering Christians ask. The conclusion seems inevitable: “*If an all-powerful God could do something to stop my suffering but doesn’t, he must want me to suffer.*” Christian people as well as non-Christians have a great deal of difficulty reconciling human suffering with the existence of a God who is both almighty and all-merciful.

Your conference has requested that this morning we approach the study of the book of Job from still a different perspective. The topic around which the conference agenda has been structured is *The Victory of Christ*. In treating this important topic, you have chosen to begin at the right place—with the Scripture of the Old and New Testaments. Almost a hundred years ago, in an article on the book of Job in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Prof. August Pieper wrote:

It is on the ground of Scripture that our theology must be rejuvenated, our practice made sound, our strength renewed. If we fail to use the Scripture, if we do not again and again study it thoroughly, we shall again become blind and lose spiritual discernment. We shall become dull, cold, lazy, and carry on the Lord’s work indifferently. We shall become flat and stale in our preaching and Seelsorge, and our word will strike no fire.¹

A necessary prerequisite to recognizing and appreciating the victory which Christ has won and which he shares with us is to be able to recognize *the Enemy at Work*, trying to rob us of the victory our Savior wants us to enjoy. That will be our specific assignment now, as we now take a closer look at the prologue to the book of Job.

The Key to Job’s Suffering

The prologue (1:1-2:10) sets the stage for the painful drama about to unfold before our eyes. More than that, it gives us the key to Job’s suffering. It shows us that the misery that entered his life did not happen by accident. *God* let it come to Job, and for a *reason*. God had a special plan for Job, and the prologue tells us what that was. God’s purpose was not, as Job’s three friends insisted, to punish Job. God’s purpose was not only to discipline him, but to refute Satan, to prove that Job’s piety was genuine and, ultimately, to bring glory to his own name. These divine purposes, of course, remained hidden from Job during the dark night of his grief. Through this trial God wanted to call forth simple faith and implicit obedience, but for him to have explained this in advance to Job would have destroyed that purpose.

¹ “The Book of Job in its Significance for Preaching and the Cure of Souls” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 57:50. 118. 197

God Evaluates Job

We get a good picture of Job in the very first verse of the book, a characterization that God himself twice reaffirms (1:8 and 2:3). The NIV translates: “*This man was blameless and upright*” (KJV: “. . . *perfect and upright*”). Both NIV and KJV leave something to be desired here. The first of those two adjectives (Hebrew: *tam*) comes from the Hebrew verb *tamam*, “to be complete.” The adjective does not say that Job was blameless or morally perfect, but that he was complete—an all-around child of God. Job’s faith and life were of one piece. He showed his faith by what he did. In heart and life he was devoted to God. I submit that “*devout*” would better reproduce the idea of the Hebrew adjective *tam*. Outsiders have often enough rubbed under our noses the fact that a man can be devout in church, but dishonest in business, and a very devil in his person-to-person relationships. That was not the case with Job. There was completeness to his piety. The last two verb forms in verse 1 (“*fearing God*”, “*shunning evil*”) bear this out. They’re Hebrew participles, indicating continuous action; here they express Job’s habitual conduct. The second adjective characterizing Job (Hebrew: *yashar*) describes him as “upright.” Job was a man of integrity. His faith was genuine, not hypocritical, not counterfeit.

A Richly Blest Man

Job is further described as “*the greatest man among all the peoples of the East,*” referring to the nomadic peoples who lived in what we today know as the Arabian Peninsula. Job’s immense herds of livestock and his large family made it clear that he enjoyed special blessings from the Giver of all good gifts. Perhaps you will agree that when reading the book of Job we tend to concentrate on the *affliction* the LORD permitted to enter his life, and that we tend to lose sight of the fact that affliction was the *exception*, and not the rule, in Job’s life. That’s too bad. God gives us a hundred good days, amid two bad ones, and our perverse nature tends to concentrate on the bad ones. If you stick your nose in Limburger cheese, the whole world stinks. The opening words of the prologue to the book of Job, however, attest to the truthfulness of the psalmist’s statement: “*Blessed are all who fear the LORD, who walk in his ways. You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours*” (Ps 128:1f).

A Spiritual Man

Verses 4 and 5 give us interesting evidence of Job’s concern for the spiritual welfare of his children. Brothers and sisters in the family took turns hosting family gatherings, and after each of these it was Job’s custom to gather the group together *vayyekaddishem* (“*and he sanctified them*”). This pious father feared that in a moment of thoughtless hilarity his children might have forgotten God and acted as though they were out of his sight. Job therefore led them in sacrificing “*a burnt offering for each of them.*” The particular type of blood sacrifice he offered is also significant. Under the Sinaitic law code the *burnt offering* (Hebrew: *‘olah*) was the only one of the four blood sacrifices in which the entire carcass of the victim went up in smoke. By offering an *‘olah* the Israelite worshiper expressed complete dedication, total devotion to the LORD.

And now to our specific assignment. You asked that this exegetical paper focus on Job 1:6 - 2:10, to enable us to get a clearer picture of

The Enemy at Work *A Look at the Spirit World*

“One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD.” The Scripture nowhere gives us special instruction, not to say a comprehensive picture, of the nature and activity of the holy angels. God is here called “*the LORD of hosts*.” Note first the spelling of the name *LORD*. When, on the pages of the Old Testament, you see that name spelled with all capital letters, you know that it’s the translation of *Yahweh*, God’s Old Testament Savior-name. He is the covenant God, the God who in an awesome display of mercy made a covenant, a binding contract, with ancient Israel. Think about that, and marvel! Why should God, who doesn’t owe us a nickel, place himself under covenant obligation to his creatures? Why? Because he is the LORD. (By contrast, when in the Old Testament you see the divine name spelled “*Lord*,” you’re looking at a translation of *adonay*, a name which describes God as the lord and master, under whom you and I live in a master-servant relationship).

Yahweh is further described as “*the LORD of hosts*,” Commander of the armies of angels who are loyal to him and carry out his wishes. The doctrine of the angels assures us that we live out our lives in the midst of a great world of spirits. Our battle against sin is not a private affair, but a battle involving a whole army of spirits. St. Paul urges us to remember that “*our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms*” (Eph 6:12). Our lapse into sin involves more than just us. By the same token, our victory over temptation is again not the concern of just a single individual, but is the occasion of rejoicing among the angels of God (Lk 15: 7,10).

A Heavenly Council

What surprises us here, what catches us completely off-guard, is that *Satan* appears among the angels who stand before God. What an unusual spectacle! The prince of darkness appears in God’s presence along with the holy angels—to offer homage, to report on work done, and to receive his assignment. There is much here that we cannot understand, and the unusual passage has been explained in two different ways. The words describing the heavenly council *may be taken literally* as a scene in the court of heaven. According to this understanding of the passage all of the angels, including the evil angels, actually had an audience with God.

Or Figurative Speech?

Prof Pieper, on the other hand, takes the words as an *anthropomorphism* (WLQ 57:53). According to this view, vv. 6ff express the truth that Satan was trying to find out whether God would decree, or at least permit, a plan spawned in hell. Regardless of whether we take the verses literally or figuratively, the story of Job is more than just the history of the sufferings a child of God went through. God here lets us look behind the curtain to a battle, a showdown between two supernatural beings in the invisible world. *One* combatant is divine and supreme; the *other* is devilish, and doomed. Satan knows he has only as much freedom as God permits him to have. He is not at liberty to pursue his mischief however he pleases. He’s on a short leash. There is a superior will to which he must bow which sets limits to his hellish activity, and which allows him to continue *only to further God’s good purpose*. In this instance God had special plans in mind for Job, and he was going to use Satan as his instrument in carrying them out.

Understand the Enemy

It’s a sobering description we have here of *the Enemy at Work*. St. John describes him as “*the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before God day and night*.” (Re 12:10) This is a

description which citizens of the 21st century need to hear. People today seem inclined either to scoff at the idea of a powerful evil spirit who masterminds all the farces of evil in the world, or they show an unholy and unwholesome fascination with the demonic and the occult. But isn't it enough to make your blood run cold to realize that Satan, in league with the sinful nature inside each of us, has a measure of *control* over us, that he has direct *access* to our souls, that he can *influence* our very thoughts and emotions? Jesus called Satan "*the prince of this world.*" A terrorist or an assassin can kill only our *body*; Satan is the murderer of *souls*. To yield to him in what may *seem* an insignificant matter is to incur God's displeasure, and puts our eternal happiness in jeopardy. To come under Satan's power means to be divorced from God.

The Main Issue

Verse 9 presents Satan's accusation: "*Does Job fear God for nothing?*" In other words, "*God, Job is your spoiled favorite. Furthermore, he's a phony. He realizes that serving you pays off!*" This was the issue around which the testing of Job centered. God was going to give Job an opportunity to demonstrate, by the most severe test imaginable, that the child of God is capable of loving God for *God's own sake* and not just for *what he gets* out of loving God. Finally the real purpose of life is not to successfully avoid all unpleasantness, or to gratify our personal ambitions and desires, but to glorify God.

Satan's First Attack

And so, without warning or provocation, Job was struck by a series of catastrophes. Two of these catastrophes were the work of foreign bandits; two were acts of God. In the process all of Job's agricultural and commercial interests were wiped out, and his family killed. He had much to lose, this "*greatest man among all the people of the East,*" and he lost it all.

Job's Reaction

Job's reaction to this evidence of *the Enemy at Work* demonstrated that God's evaluation of Job was correct. By his response to his unbelievably severe load of suffering Job showed that he was indeed a *devout* child of God, one whose life matched the profession of his lips, one whose trust in the LORD was *genuine*, not sham. In token of his grief Job tore his robe and shaved his head, and then fell to the ground—not in an orgy of self-pity, but in worship:

*"Naked I came from my mother's womb,
and naked I will depart.
The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away;
may the name of the LORD be praised."*

Several things ought to be noted here. Job's statement does not simply express resignation to fate or to an omnipotent God, who does what he wants regardless of our feelings. Job used the Tetragrammaton (Hebrew: *Yahweh*). Again, that's the name "LORD" spelled with all capital letters. It's a name that describes God, first of all, as the God of *absolute independence*. He is the great I AM. You and I exist because God has given us life; God exists because he's God. His *existence* is absolutely independent of anyone or anything else. Similarly, his *grace* is not dependent on your or my reaction to it; his grace is its own reason for being. The name "LORD" describes the covenant God also as the God of *absolute constancy*, absolute reliability. It was in that unchanging Savior God that Job now took refuge. He continued to be absolutely

convinced of the goodness of the God who was dealing with him. Job's reaction to his staggering losses was more than merely: "Well, *the Almighty gave, so I suppose he's got the right to take back what he gave.*" The ache which was tearing him apart was to Job only evidence of God's mercy, mercy which had surrounded him far so many years like sunlight on a bright day.

A century ago William Green of Princeton Seminary pointed out that, to appreciate properly Job's conduct under trial, we must remember that he went into his trial without the firm support which we Christians today take for granted. The many Gospel promises which we have known since childhood were unknown to Job. Try to envision yourself having to face crushing sorrow *without* knowing the facts of Gethsemane and Calvary and the empty tomb, and you will sympathize with Job all the more in the dark night of his soul. The precious assurances of the Scripture which we have known and loved as the very alphabet of our religion had not yet been written down for Job. How could he know, for example, that there's an important difference between chastisement and punishment, or that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, or that behind God's "*frowning countenance he hides a smiling face?*"

And so the *first* stage of Job's testing was over, and the Enemy had failed to win the victory he sought. "*In all this Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.*"

Satan's Second Attack

But the Enemy returned. St. Peter describes him as a lion forever on the prowl. Once again, in the presence of God, Satan slandered Job, and again we can see *the Enemy at Work*. "*A man will give all he has for his own life. Stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and blood, and he will surely curse you to your face.*"

And so Job went through a *second* dreary and painful round of suffering. Stricken with what was apparently a form of leprosy, "death by inches," he was plagued with swollen joints and festering sores from head to toe. "*My body burns with fever,*" he later said (30:30). To get momentary relief from the painful itching, he scraped himself with a piece of broken pottery. His appetite must have failed, because he said: "*I am nothing but skin and bones*" (19:20). His facial features presented a caricature of his former appearance, because when his three friends came to visit him "*they could hardly recognize him*" (2:12). "*My body is clothed with worms and scabs,*" he lamented, "*my skin is broken and festering*" (7:5). A rancid odor must have escaped from his tortured body, for he later complained: "*My breath is offensive to my wife; I am loathsome to my own brothers*" (19:17).

How long this went on we don't know, but after some time Job's wife added to his suffering. "*Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!*" (2:9). Commentators have often been less than kind to Job's wife, but could the Eighth Commandment apply here, too? Can we put the *best* construction on her behavior? Like her husband, she had apparently borne the first terrible trial with meekness and resignation. She had lost property and children, too, and had faced adversity as bravely as Job. We don't hear a single word of complaint from her lips.

But it wasn't easy for her to see her husband suffering as he was. And when she saw her beloved going downhill, her last earthly support apparently being taken from her, she became frantic, and angry words poured out of her like a flood. "*Job, give up trying to make sense out of this nightmare! Stop torturing yourself trying to figure out what God is trying to accomplish with you. God must be cruel. I can't love a God who treats his loyal worshipers like this. My advice is: say good-bye to him, and it will be good riddance!*"

Without realizing it, Job's wife added immeasurably to the severity of her husband's suffering. In the words of Job's wife we can again see *the Enemy at Work*.

Job's Reaction

Job's reply to her was remarkably gentle. "*You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?*" It's as though he was saying: "*I didn't expect to hear anything like that from you. Just because the Savior has permitted evil to enter our lives, should we now forget the blessings we have enjoyed from his hand.*"

Once again, Job was victorious over temptation. His trust in the LORD's goodness did not falter, and Satan's *second* temptation was frustrated. But a *third* test was ahead for Job, one that proved to be more severe than either of the first two.

Satan's Third Attack

I suppose that this essay could stop at this point. The agenda for this conference emphasizes *The Victory Of Christ*, and we've seen that Job had *won* a victory over *the Enemy at Work*, a victory of faith. Job had lived up to God's evaluation of him, and he had refuted Satan. But the essayist feels strongly that, to be fair to the book of Job, this essay ought *not* stop here. You realize, of course, that by saying that I'm taking liberties with the *letter* of the assignment given me for this conference essay: to present an exegesis of Job 1:6 - 2:10. I hope you will agree, however, that the *spirit* of the assignment, namely, to sketch *the Enemy at Work*, really requires that we also take a look ahead to what follows. The Enemy did not stop working on Job at chapter 2, verse 10. The appearance of Job's three friends introduced the last and most terrible stage of Job's suffering.

Satan knows a good opportunity when he sees one, and he certainly saw one here. He used Job's three friends as his unwilling dupes in trying to push Job over the brink, to persuade him to relax his hold on the grace of God and to renounce his trust in a gracious God. The fact that these were cherished family friends, who had made a special trip to try to help Job and to lighten his burden, only intensified the temptation Satan directed at Job through them.

We can see *the Enemy at Work* in the friends' behavior when they came to visit Job:

When they saw Job from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him . . ." (2:12f).

Job's Reaction

Look at the *effect* the friends' behavior had on Job. The very next verse tells us: "*After this Job cursed the day of his birth*" (3:1). Weeping aloud, tearing their clothes, and sprinkling dust on their heads may have been tantamount to telling Job: "*Oh, no! We didn't expect you to be looking this bad!*" And that prolonged silence! Despite the differences between their culture and ours, one would think that the friends would have had *something* to say to Job during the first seven days they spent with him, but "*no one said a word to him.*"

It seems that this was the straw that broke Job's back. Prof Pieper writes: "*After sitting in the ashes for seven days without a word, Job's 's patience and his resignation to the will of God reached its end*" {WLQ 57:62). Job unleashed a tirade in which he cursed the day he was born, 3:11-23:

Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb? . . .

*For now I would be lying down in peace; I would be asleep and at rest
Why is life given to the bitter of soul, to those who long for death? . . .
Why is life given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has hedged in? “*

In his vehemence Job made God responsible for his plight.

The Dialogue

With Job’s tirade the three cycles of dialogue begin which occupy the bulk of the book of Job. 28 of the 42 chapters of the book deal with

- the comments Job’s three friends made to him, and
- Job’s anguished (and often angry) responses.

Throughout the eight speeches of the friends, we notice their relentless logic:
(major premise): God is just.
(minor premise): As a just God, he must punish the wicked.
(conclusion): Since God is punishing you, Job, you must be wicked.

And once again we see *the Enemy at Work*.

In speaking to Job the three friends consistently referred to God either as *Elohim* (the Creator, who is to be held in reverence), or as *Shaddai* (the God who displays power). Never once in all these chapters do we read that the friends referred to God as *Yahweh* (the God of free and faithful grace). This failure on their part had a particularly disastrous effect on Job, in that when responding to the friends he now no longer referred to God as the gracious God of the covenant. With a single exception (12:9) Job followed the friends in calling God “the Almighty,” “the sovereign Creator,” “the Sovereign Lord and master of all.”

The friends argued: “Wherever God sees sin he must punish. God’s punitive justice is *absolute*.” Job disagreed. As he saw it, God’s punitive justice is not absolute it’s *arbitrary*.

*“Even if I summoned him and he responded,
I do not believe he would give me a hearing.”
He destroys both the blameless and the wicked” (9:16.22).*

We see further evidence of *the Enemy at Work* when Job accused God of being an enemy who had set him up for target practice:

*“He has made me his target; his archers surround me.
Without pity he pierces my kidneys and spills my gall on the ground.
Again and again he bursts upon me; he rushes at me like a warrior” (16:12ff).*

Job’s words betray a fearful sense of abandonment. But coupled with that is his simmering resentment:

My face is red with weeping; deep shadows ring my eyes, yet my hands have been free of violence (16:16f).

Here is Job’s sin: he dared to blame *God*, so that *he* might appear to be righteous.

Let me speak, and you reply. How many wrongs and sins have I committed? Show me my offense and my sin (13:22f).

The great big, powerful God; poor little helpless Job!

Even the casual reader of the book of Job senses a conflict here—between the bitter charges Job raised against God and the beautiful *statements of faith* that earlier came from his lips: “*I know that my Redeemer lives; and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.*

*And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God;
I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another” (19:25-27).*

These words, in which the faith of Job reached its finest and most beautiful expression, deserve a closer look. The word Job used for “*Redeemer*” is the Hebrew word *go’el*, the person in ancient Israel who espoused the cause of his injured or impoverished relative. To be specific: the *go’el*:

- ransomed a poor kinsman from slavery;
- paid off a mortgage which a poverty-stricken kinsman had contracted;
- avenged a kinsman’s murder;
- married the kinsman’s widow to prevent the extinction of his family line. Job felt that his death was imminent, but he had the firm confidence that even death could not separate him from the One who would play the part of a kinsman-redeemer for him. Job knew he had a living witness and defender, an ever-living Redeemer, who had the power to save and to destroy, who would rescue him from wrong, and who would defend him from false accusation (like those his three friends had leveled at him).

Quarreling with God vs. Trust in God

Doesn’t something disturb you in Job’s behavior? Job said some terribly sharp things to God. We heard him accuse God of being his enemy, of being unjust, of being cruel, of being arbitrary, all the while stoutly affirming his own innocence. Prof. Pieper asks: “Is not this quarreling with God sin that *eo ipso* blots out faith?” (WLQ 57:66). Isn’t faith essentially *trust* that God is supremely good and gracious, one who not only does not treat us unjustly, but who has proved himself merciful in a thousand different situations every day? The question that bothers us when we hear Job speak is this: when I quarrel with God, can an *affirmation* of his grace exist alongside that *denial* of his grace?

Pieper emphasizes that although we cannot explain this psychologically, the fact remains that Job said enough to assure us that, despite his quarreling, he did not lose his trust completely. *The Enemy was at Work* in the heart of Job, but he did not achieve his objective. As we have observed Job from a distance, as we have listened to him react to what his friends were saying, perhaps it has seemed to you that you were watching a strong swimmer swimming in a high sea. At times you can’t see him because he’s submerged, but then he reappears, to fight the waves. Job’s words are evidence that he vacillated between hope and hopelessness. On the one hand, there are dozens of statements from his mouth that show he was tortured by the image of an angry God, yet there is strong evidence that he never abandoned his faith in a living and loving God.

Job’s quarreling with God and his attacks on God resulted not from malice, but from simple weakness. In chapter 7 Job spat out these words in God’s face:

*“I will not keep silent; . . .
I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.
Am I the sea, or the monster of the deep,
that you put me under guard? . . .
You frighten me . . . and terrify me . . .
Let me alone. . . .
Why do you not pardon my offenses and forgive my sins? “ (7:11-21).*

Now that is a foolish prayer (ascribing his suffering to God’s anger and asking God to leave him alone), but that is not the prayer of one fallen from faith. No unbeliever prays like that. Prof. Pieper says:

“In the midst of all his sufferings, of all his temptations and wrong thoughts concerning God, in the midst of all the willful raging of his heart and mouth, in the midst of all the despair, Job’s faith persevered to the end. God carried his paint over against Satan, who had cast suspicion on Job’s godliness. Job was God’s faithful servant, his beloved, God fearing child, when God handed him over to Satan. He proved himself as such in the temptation. God acknowledged him as such when he disclosed himself to Job, even though he sternly rebuked him for his folly and pride. And in the end he confirmed him as such by calling him ‘my servant Job’ (42:7) and by renewing his blessing” (WLQ 57:71).

The Enemy at Work: We Complain

Unfortunately the story of Job is not just ancient history. What goes on in your heart and mine provides all the evidence we need that *the Enemy Is Still at Work*. Think of the *complaining*, the pitiful *whining* God must hear from us when life doesn’t treat us as fairly as we think it ought to, when family problems, or failing health, or financial concerns give us stressful days and sleepless nights. Even pastors, who ought to know better, aren’t immune to complaining. The Enemy invites us to a pity party. Our workload is too heavy. Our efforts are not properly appreciated. We’re really cut out for bigger and better things. (“*With all my gifts I should be giving advanced harp lessons to a group of angels, and here I’m stuck with this bunch of clods!*”). Are we so preoccupied with our *feelings* that we lose sight of how *God feels* toward us?

The Enemy at Work: We Want a Miracle

Like Job, we’re tempted to measure God’s love *by what we see*. We’d like some *hard evidence* of God’s mercy to show up in our lives. But for me to demand that God give me a sign that he loves me is a piece of unbelief. Woody Allen says:

If God would only speak to me - just once. If he’d only cough. If I could just see a miracle. If I could see a burning bush, or the seas part. If only God would give me a clear sign, like making a large deposit in my name in a Swiss bank.

What effect did the dozens of miracles have which Christ performed? Did they solve all human disappointment when Jesus was on earth? Christ’s miracles were previews of what Christ

will do for all creation when he returns, but they did not, they cannot create faith. Think of the display of heavenly fireworks the Israelites saw every day and every night for forty years. Did the miracles they experienced from the hand of their faithful God—water from a rock, fresh manna every morning—lead them to trust him? As they stood around Mt. Sinai, while they were digesting in their own stomachs the miracle of the manna, they got impatient, forgot all about God, and built a golden calf. Power can do a lot of things, but it cannot create the thing God wants most: love for him. But the Enemy tempts us to say: “*God, if you love me, show me!*”

The Enemy at Work: We’re Not Satisfied to Let God Remain Hidden

The Enemy is Still at Work. He led Job repeatedly to ask “*Why?*” He tempts us to second-guess our loving God. Deep down inside we want to believe that Jesus is in control of his world and of our lives, but often it surely doesn’t look like it, and we demand to know why. “*Does God enjoy watching me fall on my face? If he has a wonderful plan for my life, why doesn’t he tell me why this is happening to me?*”

We’re tempted to complain that God doesn’t give us enough clear guidance. God’s hiddenness is a problem for us. God simply has not told us everything we might like to know, and the Enemy tempts us to be dissatisfied with that. Even the great St. Augustine wondered when he read the account of Jesus’ miracle at the Pool of Bethesda. There Jesus met and healed a man who’d been a cripple for 38 years. “*Get up!*” Jesus told him, and the man “*picked up his mat and walked.*” Then what did Jesus do? St. John tells us: “*Jesus slipped away into the crowd.*” Augustine wondered Why?

“*There lay so many there, and yet only one was healed, while with a word he could have raised them all up.*”

The book of Job provides the most direct answer to be found anywhere in the Scripture to these temptations of the Enemy. That’s why the book of Job is so helpful - not only for suffering Christians, but for pastors who counsel Christians who are suffering from the temptations of *the Enemy at Work*. Unfortunately, summarizing the help that the book of Job offers was not part of my assignment for this conference essay. And this time I cannot plead that, although the *letter* of my assignment does not call for this, the *spirit* of the assignment really does. When I was a kid my mother taught me that, when you’re a guest in somebody’s house, you follow the house rules. You don’t rip on the host or the hostess. I don’t know of a polite way to say this, but it’s really not fair for the Program Committee to ask a man who taught the book of Job for twenty years in a Senior Isagogics classroom to deliver an essay on Job which focuses only on *the Enemy at Work*.

In the time remaining to me, (and please remember I was promised 60-90 minutes of time on this morning’s agenda), permit me to direct your attention away from the Enemy, and to summarize the *positive* message of the book of Job. What does this book have to offer Joe or Jane Christian when they’re having a difficult time of it? What guidelines does the book offer them, to help them evaluate the way God is handling their situation?

The Great Principles of God’s World Government

More clearly than any other Bible book, the book of Job enunciates the great principles according to which God rules his world. There are *three*, represented in turn by the three friends, by Elihu, and by God himself.

Gods Punitive Justice

The one doctrine of the Scripture which the *friends* understood very well was that God rewards a man according to his works.

“Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed? As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it” (4:7f).

That was Eliphaz speaking. Bildad likewise emphasized that God exercises *punitive justice* in his world government when he told Job:

*“Does God pervert justice?
Does the Almighty pervert what is right?
When your children sinned against him,
he gave them over to the penalty of their sin.
But if you will look to God and plead with the Almighty,
if you are pure and upright,
even now he will rouse himself on your behalf
and restore you to your rightful place” (8:3-6).*

The *retributive justice* of God is surely one factor which God takes into account as he rules his world. What was wrong, then, when Job’s friends emphasized this? The friends pictured God’s justice *as absolute*. It was here that Job had difficulty with the theology of his friends. He certainly knew that God is a God who rewards the good and punishes the evil, but Job denied that God’s punitive justice is absolute. Job argued:

*“Why do the wicked live on,
growing old and increasing in power?
Their homes are safe and free from fear;
the rod of God is not upon them . . .
They spend their years in prosperity
and go down to the grave in peace.
Yet they say to God, ‘Leave us alone!
Who is the Almighty, that we should serve him?’
The evil man is spared from the day of calamity,
he is delivered from the day of wrath.
Who repays him for what he has done? . . .
So how can you console me with your nonsense?” (21:7ff)*

A part of the knowledge the pastor standing at a bedside or counseling with a troubled Christian will need to have is that the God who runs this world is a just God. That’s the message of God’s law, and the law of God knows no mercy. The account of the flood, and the firestorm that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, show that God means it when he announces: *“Cursed is the man who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out” (Dt 27:26).*

God’s Saving Love

Unfortunately the friends of Job stopped here; the Christian pastor and counselor dare not. God’s retributive justice is not the only principle of God’s world government. As we study the record of God’s dealings with sinners, we note that from the earliest days of world history

God's justice has been *coupled with his infinite mercy*, his patience, his faithfulness. Cain, the first murderer, did not receive God's rigorous retaliation for his evil deed. Or think of what God announced after the waters of the flood had drowned billions of screaming unbelievers:

"Never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done" (Gn 8:21).

Here is what *Elihu* emphasized in his conversations with Job, and a valuable emphasis it is, indeed. Elihu emphasized God's good purpose in opposition to the friends, who ignored it, and in opposition to Job, who was unable to recognize it in the dark night of his grief. God's saving mercy, together with his punitive justice, is a principle according to which God rules the world.

But, having said that, we have not solved all the problems that still remain for the person who observes the way God operates in his world government. The thoughtful student of the Old Testament will often wander: "*Why did God spare Cain but kill Korah?*" As you study church history you often wonder: "*Why have the enemies of Christ's church had such an easy time of it, and the faithful handful such a difficult time for so much of history? Right at the present time, why are Christians being persecuted in the Sudan, and in China?*"

God's Incomprehensible Majesty

Here the book of Job emphasizes a third fact about God's world rule. In strict harmony with his justice and his mercy, God rules the world according to his *incomprehensible majesty*. This was the particular emphasis of *God's* two speeches, in chapters 38-41.

Let's backtrack. Job had foolishly demanded:

"I desire to speak to the Almighty and to argue my case with God" (13:3).

"If only I knew where to find him...I would state my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments. I would find out what he would answer me. He would not press charges against me....

And] would be delivered forever from my judge" (23:3ff).

But God did not grant Job his day in court. God is not in the habit of submitting to trial by his creatures. Instead the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth replied:

"Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?

Brace yourself like a man;

I will question you, and you shall answer me" (38:2f).

And then followed God's first discourse - two whole chapters' worth of questions exposing Job's ignorance and extolling God's wisdom. He asked Job on what the earth's footings are set, and who fixes boundaries for the water of the oceans, and where the light comes from, and how long the mountain goat carries her young before giving birth.

"Job, I am wise; you know nothing. Who are you to contend with me? Job, if you can't even comprehend the visible world you live in, How dare you expect to comprehend a world and a God you cannot see?"

As you listen to Job's answer, remember he's the one who earlier had asked for the chance to argue his case with God:

"I am unworthy -how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth.

I spoke once, but I have no answer-

Twice, but I will say no more" (40:4f).

Job was through talking, but God wasn't. The theme of God's second discourse is sounded clearly at the outset:

"Do you have an arm like God's?" (40:9).

There's a shift in emphasis here, from God's omniscience to his omnipotence.

"Job, I can do everything; you can do nothing.

Who are you to contend with me?"

God showed Job his frailty and reproved his arrogance. Job, who had criticized God's use of his power, was led to realize how ridiculous his judgment in the matter is. A frail creature of dust, who had to run in fear from wild animals, had not hesitated to insult the majesty of him who created man and beast. In his two discourses at the close of the book God served notice that he does not recognize our right to judge him and his ways.

Our God is a God of *incomprehensible majesty*, and he reserves for himself the right to let the ungodly prosper and to plague the God-fearing. This hiddenness of God is not a popular doctrine; it goes down hard. Like Job, we want to *know*. We often try to drag God out of his hiddenness, forgetting that such insistence is an attack on his majesty. God owes nobody an explanation when in his world government he chooses to act in *retributive justice* or in *saving mercy*.

Was this humiliation more of the same sort of treatment Job had earlier received from his three friends? No. God was not holding up a man to be a laughingstock, to destroy him. This was the affectionate rebuke of a loving Father to his beloved child, with the sole purpose of restoring him to health. This was strong medicine, but wholesome medicine. Job did not get what he had asked for—a chance to stand up in court and bring charges against the Almighty—but he got something better.

- He got a reminder not only of his sinfulness, but of his littleness.
- He learned that humility is the only moral attitude before God. *"I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."*
- He heard the Savior reaffirm his status as God's dear child.

Job had not only learned how to overcome the temptation of *the Enemy at Work*, but he learned it the hard way - by actual experience. This is not to say that Job now understood exactly *why* God had done what he had, but Job had learned not to question, not to ask God to give an account. His Savior's warm embrace was all the assurance he needed that the Savior was serious about lavishing him.

In the desert of Judea and on a skull-shaped hill our Champion fought the Prince of Hell and defeated him. Through his apostle he has promised us that *"...neither angels nor demons . . . nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* That's God's promise, and he cannot lie.