

The richest man from the East, Tested in his faith in God

Who is this man?

He was probably a native of Northern Arabia. He was a righteous and God-fearing non-Israelite. Perhaps, he lived before the covenant family of Israel even existed. His life is the most profound one ever can think about dealing with the mystery of suffering. Every one of us wrestles with the old age question: "If God is a just and loving God, why does He permit a true righteous man to suffer intensively?" But this man's life reveals the following truth: Satan as an opponent to God sometimes receives permission to test the genuineness of our faith by afflicting us in some ways. But the grace of God will always triumph over our suffering, if we remain steadfast and in-removable in faith which we have in Christ Jesus.

He owned herds of thousands of cattle

Among the property of this man were seven-thousand sheep. They give us an idea that we can say in our days, he probably was involved in the winter-clothe provision of the area with a huge wool-production. He probably had about 150 employees taking care of these sheep. In addition, he owned three-thousand camels. In the ancient world, the camels were like trucks today, because they could transport many things at a time. (Even today, camels are saver for transports in the wilderness than any modern jeeps or trucks!) He also had five-hundred yoke of oxen and five-hundred donkeys. The oxen were used for farming like tractors, today, and the donkeys were used to carry the harvest like harvester-machines, today. At least, there must have been five-hundred workers to help in this big farming. No wonder that we read about this man that he had a "great number" of servants!

Also a family-man

Even though this man was very rich, he also was a true family-man. As a godly father, this man was deeply concerned about his children's spiritual welfare. He watched their conduct and lifestyle, praying that they would be kept from evil and would experience God's blessings and salvation. He is an example of a father who really had a heart for his children by devoting his time and attention necessarily to keep them from a life of sin. One of the greatest tragedies in the Old Testament is that people had failed to love their children enough to teach them the ways and the commands of God. If the church today fails to become what God wants it to be, one factor may be that once again the father's hearts have forsaken their children by failing to love them, spend time with them and teach them God's word and righteousness standards. Let us remember, in the Garden of Eden, there was no ministry like a prophet, pastor, evangelist or teacher, but there was a family.

Satan questions the man's motives

Because of this man's blameless and whole-hearted commitment to God, when one day the angels came to present themselves before God and Satan also came with them, God had a conversation with Satan about this man. God asked Satan: "Have you considered my servant?" Satan reacted to God's claim that this man would be a godly person in questioning the man's motive of belief. He said that the reality of this man's righteousness would be self-serving that the man worshipped God only because it profited him. That should mean the man's love for God would not be genuine. And if God would stop to give that man protection, wealth and divine healing, this man would stop worshipping God and curse God to His face.

Satan begins to attack

After this conversation, God gave Satan the authority over this man's property and family. However, God limited Satan as to what he could do, for he was not given the power of death over the man. Therefore, Satan brought violent weather and violent people against this man's cattle, his fields and his servants as well as against all his children. This is well-known as his "first test." Remember, a few days ago, the man had had everything going on for him. And now he was in the position of hearing evil report. Four times, it is said that "while" one man was speaking, another man came with another evil report. And probably, after finishing their reports, the men collapsed or at least needed medical help because they had been in the midst of that brutality.

The man's reaction

The rich man who had lost all his beloved children and everything that he owned reacted to the disasters with intensive grief, but also with humility. In the midst of extreme adversity where he had to search for his children's dead bodies before he could bury them, and also the servants who had lost their lives; in this sense of isolation from God, emotionally tormented, yet, he fell to the ground and worshipped! What would you and I have done as Christians? We may experience severe suffering and unexplainable afflictions. We should pray for God's grace to accept what has come upon us and ask God's revelation and understanding concerning its meaning. This man's circumstances were suddenly revised by a series of great calamities that destroyed his possessions, children and emotions, but he was completely innocent, not knowing that he was deeply involved in a conflict between God and Satan.

The man still maintained his integrity

Satan's first plan of testing the man had failed. The former rich man who was now a poor and tormented man still worshipped God. One day, when the angels of God came to present themselves before the Lord, Satan also came again to present himself. Then God asked him the same question, again, but this time, God added four credentials:

- a) There was no-one on earth like this man.
- b) He was blameless and upright.
- c) He was a man who feared God and hated evil.
- d) He still maintained his integrity.

God said to Satan: "You incited me against this man to ruin him without any reason." Could this man's innocent suffering be the fore-shadow of Jesus Christ, the gentle man of sorrows, who was also acquainted with grieves that no man desired to have Him? And could this also be a fore-shadow of believers who suffer persecution because of their faith in Jesus Christ?

He is in your hands!

Satan claimed that no-one would worship God if his body was afflicted with diseases. Therefore, God said: "Okay, he's in your hands." This is known as the man's second test. Satan afflicted him with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head that even his wife said he should curse God and die. His three friends wanted to find intellectual answers to what had happened to this man. But in all, the man didn't listen to their false advices which were definitely false even though they came from people who were close to his heart. The man didn't give up but rather choose to prove his genuineness of his belief in God, humbled himself and still worshipped God. The friends sincerely tried to help the man by arguing him to admit some sin. But in the end, God rebuked them for this error. The end of everything is better than the beginning. I think it does not matter how we start with God, but it is very important how we end with Him. It always amazes me that a man full of wisdom called Solomon was said in the Bible to have departed from God at his old age. But not this man whom we're talking about, now. May he be the example of the triumphing church at the end of the time!

The redeemer

The redeemer of whom this man confessed in his troubles, or the mediator for whom he longed and the answer to his deepest questions and needs all find their fulfilment in Jesus Christ. Jesus identified fully with human suffering as God's appointed redeemer, mediator, wisdom, healer, light and life. In all, let us remember that in our suffering God is involved. Even though Satan is the god of this world, he is able to afflict our lives only by God's permissive will. God has promised in His Word that He will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear. He has also promised to bring good out of all the suffering and the persecutions that we will go through, just as we read in the life of this man. Whatever he lost, he received it back double to the glory of God's praise. At the right time, when his friends were about to persuade him to deviate from his standards, the possessor of the universe spoke, and there was a great silent. God Himself defended this man and restored him into the beauty of His holiness and turned this man's sorrows into joy. And Jesus is here to do the same thing for us!

I think you will know by this time, about which man this all is, but only in case you're not quite sure, let me say: The name of this man was JOB, and we believe he was a really strong believer, and we can learn from him how he never gave up to trust in God, unimportantly, whatever storms hit his life.

Three questions of thoughts

- a) Did Job fear God for nothing?
- b) Was Job's patience only to God's kindness?
- c) Were Job's friends right to accuse him?

a) We live in a world in which giving and taking extend to many of us our faith. This is the principle that if we ask many believers, today, why they believe in God, the reply always comes that it is because of all the wonderful things God has done for them. This means, their fellowship with God operates on the basis of giving and taking. Satan accused God of having that kind of relationship with Job. He charged Him to have bought Job's loyalty by rewarding him with wealth and security (Job 1:9,10). As Satan accurately pointed out, buying devotion is suspected because it is liable to vanish at the moment when God's supply ceases (V 11). However, Satan misjudged Job's character. Destroying all his possessions and the tragic loss of his family, Job nevertheless blessed the name of the Lord and refused to blame God for his troubles (V 21,22). Later, when Satan touched Job's body, he still refused to turn away from God. He said: "Should one accept only good things from God?" Job's action in his adversity shows that he did not fear God for nothing (Ch 2:9,10). Was Job's integrity not a powerful respond to Satan's question if Job did fear God for nothing? The answer was yes, Job did fear God for nothing in return. His devotion was not bought; it was a gift. Could the same be said of you and I? Do we follow God because of the rewards? Do we believe we receive from Him? Suppose, your good gifts from God would all be taken away from you. Would you still honour Him? Is our commitment to the Lord out of a genuine faith? Is it the kind of steadfast faith that we can declare: "Though He slay me, yet, I will trust Him" (Job 13:15)? Here is one of the most significant statements of faith about God's goodness that was ever spoken. Whatever God allowed to happen to Job, whatever burden He laid upon him or allowed Satan to bring upon Job; Job believed God ultimately that He would not fail him. Was that not the same expression like Apostle Paul's confidence in God's love, later? Although the Lord may take away comfort after comfort, our health may be in the highest problem, and waves of trouble are everywhere; we can trust God with unwavering faith, convinced that He is right, just and good God. Can you fit yourself in this situation of storms of life and still trusting in God's loving-kindness?

b) Job's devotion to God in the face of catastrophic disasters (Job 1:22) has become proverbial today. We all, believers and unbelievers speak about the patience of Job to indicate an unusual perseverance and longsuffering. Yet, Scripture teaches that the out-coming of Job's life is a testimony not only of Job's ability to endure discomfort, but also of God's loving-kindness mercy (James 5:11). Let us remember that almost by definition of disaster, it comes suddenly without warning. Even though people know that earth-quakes, famines, accidents and death are bound to occur, but still, we all are shocked when they do. The tragedies that claimed Job's possessions and family (Job 1:13-17) came suddenly and without warning. We can imagine that Job knew of the ever-present risk under which he and his family lived under. For he said: "That which I feared has come upon me" (Job 3:25). Job's greatest desire had been for the presence and favour of God. Now, the things he feared mostly, had happened: The bands of Sabeans raiders (Job 1:15), lightening the fire of God (V 16), the bands of Chaldeans on the prowl for fresh camels (V 17) and wind storms (V 19), we can label it, today, with the terrorism around the world, today, and natural disasters occurring around us. Yet, even though Job must have known that sooner or later he would be confronted with such dangers, Job was still thunderstruck when the news of their occurrences reached him (V 20). In this way, we can see that Job and his family were like most of us, today. We're conscious of risks, but living out our lives in day-to-day routines. As we believe in God, the grace of God guides us, daily. Many who don't accept God's help are still helped by His grace. Paul says: "In Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Didn't Jesus warn us that the conditions at the end of the age would be similar that people would be going around, doing their daily works, eating, drinking, marrying and giving into marriage and even being forgetful of the fact that the Lord is coming back (Matthew 24:38-42)? May I ask you a personal question: Will you be ready when Jesus comes, today? Hasn't Jesus told us followers that we should be ready by faithfully going about the responsibilities which He has entrusted unto us? As a matter of fact, there is no shame in being taken by surprise in natural disasters, financial difficulties in the church, or catastrophes

like in Job's life. But is there any accuse for being shocked as the Lord's return when He has already told us He would be coming back for us, the universal church of all cultures?

c) When we're facing trials and suffering, the last thing we need is a set of Job's counsellors, people who will only tell us what they think we could have done wrong rather than having people on our back. Wouldn't each one of us who's facing problems prefer people who are on one team with us, who support us and wrestle with us on our problems? Unfortunately, Job had to go through his trials without much support. Three of his friends came when they learned of his troubles (Job 2:11). But they are remembered more for their condemnation of Job than for their comfort. The truth of this matter is, the three friends started out with good intentions. In fact, their actions served as a useful pattern for intervening in the midst of a friend's disasters. They came as a group to be with their friend, agreed ahead of time that they should come to Job's aid. They wanted to mourn with him and comfort him. As they came, they openly wept for him when they could not recognize him in his disfigured body. They tore their robes in anguish for him which was a custom in those days. They gave Job their silent presence for seven days, willing just to be with him and refraining from speaking until Job began to speak with them. And they listened patiently to Job's laments and frustrations. As we today seek to comfort people around us who are feeling deep pain and suffering, can't we learn a lesson from Job's friends and from the attitude which they had towards this man of sorrows? Sometimes, just being quiet with hurt people can be a great encouragement to them. Of course, they were not right of later accusing Job. But don't we do the same thing, today? Many of us, today, even would not see much of God's kindness in the situation, at all. God had allowed Job to go through the tragic loss of his family, possessions and health. To us, Job's suffering even though he was a person of integrity, seems to be unfair. Yet, the book, itself, teaches, that none of us knows all that a person will need to know to pass judgement in such a situation. That is left in the hands of the Creator (Job 38:1-3; 42:3). We cannot say why Job went through what he did, but we do know that God responded with compassion. Even Job's questions went beyond his own understanding and the understanding of his friends just as many of us have a lot of questions in our minds, today. But there is responds of God to some of the worst questions which we have in our minds. And if we prove ourselves faithful like Job did, at the end, God will prove Himself faithful, to us, in whatever circumstances we find ourselves.

Job's hope in the resurrection

It seems that Job had a personal believe in the resurrection power of God. He said: "If a man dies, will he live, again?" (Job 14:13-15). Job believed that after he died and entered the grave, God would call him out, again. In other words, Job expressed his hope in a personal resurrection. The basis for this hopeful expectation was God's fervent love for His people; God would long for the creature that His hands have made. Job said also in Job 19: 25.26: "I know that my redeemer lives and that in the end I will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet, in my flesh, I will see God". By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Job's testimony pointed to Jesus Christ, the answer and solution of seen and unseen problems. Jesus would come to save His people from sin and condemnation, free them from the fear of death and give them eternal life. He would rescue them from the coming wrath, and prophetically, Job expressed his inner conviction that after his body would have decayed in the grave, he would physically be raised and would go in the resurrected body to see his redeemer God. Doesn't this tell us something about God's revelation concerning Christ Jesus' future coming at the end of time? How blessed are those who have received Him as their personal Lord and Saviour! And if you have not, you can receive Him now. Make up your mind, where you want to spend eternity, and may God bless us, all, as we take this quality decision to be with Him.

Modern people's view of God and Satan

Psychology has done a great work in the past by contributing to the healing of people with mental sicknesses. But some theories of psychology have also destroyed many areas of truth by casting doubt on the objective reality of evil and the devil. That presents problems for those who read the Bible in account of demon possessions like the example we have in Luke 9 and who believe that demonic power can play a role in physical or mental illnesses. Some schools of psychology reduce religious experiences to nothing but unconscious drives projected onto the external world. In their opinion, Satan is no more than a personification of one's deepest,

dark emotions. Likewise, God is reduced to the embodiment of a fully authenticated self, parental ideals, social mores or universal symbol of goodness. Without question, a genuine encounter with God or Satan may involve intense emotional and psychological experiences. But that does not make either one less real. The Bible affirms the existence of Satan and demons in scores of scriptural texts. Let us be careful as Jesus warned us about the yeast of the Sadducees and also of the Herodeans (Matthew 22: 15- 32). It refers to a spirit of secularism and worldliness, unbiblical traditions or secular humanistic type of believing in God. And to accept this, will cause the true church to turn against Christ and the apostolic doctrine of God's Word. The Sadducees were the theological liberals and anti-super-naturalists of their days, while appearing to hold to the things of God, but they really denied the basics of its true teaching. They rejected the doctrine of the resurrection, angels, miracles, immortality and the judgement which is to come. How does this look like, today? Do you personally accept these all or deny them? Those who followed these teachings were morally lax and worldly, and they were the ones who persecuted Jesus, even thinking that they would be working for God. And that spirit of rejecting the spirit world is with us, today. There is heaven to gain, and there is hell to loose. The choice is yours. May God grant you wisdom to choose life which God has provided in Christ Jesus!